

JOHN KIRIAMITI

SON OF FATE



VISIT...

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Son of Fate

John Kiriakos

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John Kiriamiti



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Dedicated to Julian and Ann-Rita

Dear Reader,

After writing my first two books, *My Life in Crime* and *My Life with A Criminal* (Miliys story) I received hundreds of letters from my fans and a good number of friends who include three authors advising me to try my hand at fiction.

With this encouragement I set off to write this book which I decided to name "Son of Fate". It wasn't a very easy job to create characters from the blues and put them into action, but with determination I made it.

I would therefore like to let it be known to you that all the characters in this book are as fictitious as the "Son of Fate" himself. If any name of a person coincides with those in this book, you should know that nothing of the kind was intended. With this I wish you all a nice reading.

Yours sincerely,

John Kiriamiti

Prologue

//rip ing! Ting! Ting! Ting!" The electronic watch my wife had taken off and put on top of the television set made me glance at my own watch. It was precisely 10.00 o'clock. We had arrived thirty minutes earlier from St. Peter Clavers Church where we had attended the early mass. Somehow, this reminded me of the sermon Father Qrol had given about good marriage. Seated comfortably on a sofa set, a typewriter before me on a coffee table, a heap of printing papers on the left hand side of the machine, and about eight papers I had already printed lying in a mess on the right, I could not help wondering how an unmarried person could manage to give such a touching, attractive and convincing advice to the married. As we left the church, the father had ordered we be supplied with pamphlets titled 'Happy Marriage' at

the door and our maid had taken one to educate herself on the issue. As far as I was concerned, and I think my wife too, our marriage was quite a success and among the happiest.

"Ndandii, ndandii, mm," our two year old kid interrupted my work. I stopped typing as he reached for my shoulder. I noticed he had taken his tiny tongue out wanting me to kiss it. I did so and the kid got off the seat and crawled away happily. What a stupid thing to get amused about, I thought and dismissed it from my mind and continued typing. I had been given a column in a newly started magazine called 'East African Monthly'. It covered East African Politics, Economy and Leisure. The editor in chief, an old friend of mine, had written to me asking whether I would be interested in running a column on astronomy. This was my line and my friend knew it. I had read widely about

astronomy, my interest being that I wanted to know whether there was any possibility of existence of life in the other galaxies. For four months I had ran the column which had turned out to be very successful. Hundreds of my readers had written back, giving me plenty of encouragement and to their request the editor had added two more pages to satisfy them.

"Daddy." This time it was my wife calling. Everybody in this house called me daddy since the kid began muttering the word. I looked up and saw her approaching with a kettle and two cups on a tray.

"What will you take? Black coffee or cocoa?"

"Either," I answered, pulled the paper I was typing out of the machine and started reading it. A minute later, the maid Kadogo, brought some sandwiches my wife had prepared. I got some appetite, put the paper aside as my wife pushed the typewriter aside to give me room.

Joy, my wife, stirred some cocoa for me. I moved nearer, took the steaming mug and sipped its contents. I took a sandwich and bit deeply. From the corners of my eyes I noticed Joy, who had taken a seat beside me, enjoying my appetite with much satisfaction. Seeing I

had noticed her staring at me she asked, "What do you prefer for lunch? I can make you some chapatis. She knew I liked them after doing a long imprisonment term where things like chapatis and even tea were a day dream.

"I am planning to take you out for lunch," I answered. "Tell Kadogo to prepare herself. Did I hear you say she's planning to get married or was it a dream I had?" I asked.

She laughed and told me, "Yes. The houseboy next door has had his eyes on her since she hit this house." I too laughed for no reason I could clearly tell. Most probably at the thought of the youngsters marrying and still wanting to stick to their jobs.

"What's the fun?" Joy asked when I continued laughing, imagining the kind of life the couple would have.

"Why don't you increase Kadogo's salary by thirty per cent. It'd be one hell of a good idea.* I said to put her off the trail though I was serious about the increment of the salary.

"A too-late-good advice, dear. I've been saving for her for the past two years ... a bank account."

"Does she know about it?" I asked in surprise, admiring my wife as I did so.

"Why should I tell her? I was intending to surprise her on the Christmas day she'll decide to visit her home."

"Please do not change your mind even if you disagree, and remind me to boost the savings by one thousand shillings at the end of this month."

"Oh, that's great, dear. I have been intending to tell you but every time I propose to do it I change my mind." That's how we were, my Joy and me - very generous where and when we could afford.

"But Daddy, you've been laughing for a different reason. Don't put me off like that." She knew my ways of avoiding talking about things which amused me secretly.

"How old is Kadogo?" I asked.

"An adult of course. She is eighteen."

"And her fiance?"

"How would I know?"

"Well . . . but certainly a teenager too, wouldn't you say?"

"Yah - which makes him an adult as well if he is a year older than her."

"And you still don't see anything funny in the set up?"

"I am not a critic. I judge things from their face value. In fact it's the other day I was thinking about you journalists. For instance, you and your humour column in the Daily news. We go for a trip together and when I next read the column about the trip I can't help laughing, wondering when you noticed the things you have written about. I think it's great to be a journalist, I mean

you people live in a different world from us even if we appear to be together." That's a thing I had heard from hundreds of people and it bored me to listen to. I was about to answer her when we were interrupted.

"Daddy." This time it was the maid. I faced her.

"What's the problem, Dogo-Dogo?" I heard Joy chuckle. I knew why, she disliked me addressing Kadogo as dogodogo.

"I wish you'd understand how I dislike that nickname you give Kadogo," Joy told me.

"But that's the name in the streets for girls her age. She likes it. Isn't it,

Kadogo?"

"I don't mind. The name won't stick because I am growing up," she laughed.

"Yah. That makes a lot of sense. What was your problem?" I cut off the topic. I didn't like making prolonged jokes with her. I knew several happy marriages which had been broken into pieces by maids, especially when they started growing fat cheeks and shining faces. Husbands made a habit of forgetting office keys, note books, money in their wallets, just to give themselves excuses to rush home while the wives were away. I didn't want to start forgetting anything - Joy was everything to me. The maid continued:

"Daddy, there are three shirts I have missed for sometime. They just seem to have vanished." I turned to my wife to see whether she had an explanation but what I saw on her face told me that she was more surprised than I was. I turned to face Kadogo.

"Since when. . . I mean for how long do you think you have missed them?"

"It is about three months now," She said, and instantly I remembered I had given them away to a friend who had all his clothes stolen. I told them so. apologized for not having told them earlier and dismissed the issue.

When she had gone, Joy faced me and said, "See, what good a wife she can make? I think that will make you change your opinion on her proposed marriage." Joy was taking advantage of the occurrence to put me on the defensive.

I didn't want to continue arguing so I said, "Yah, it is very unfortunate of me not to have met her before I met you. It is too late now to change my mind." She understood the joke and broke into pearls of laughter while hitting me on my left shoulder. I reached for her half-eaten sandwich and before she noticed it, it was halfway gone. As she started wrestling with me to retrieve her sandwich there came a knock at the

door- a very heavy knock.

We didn't get enough time to stop our playing before the door was pushed open and a tall, brown, heavily built man stepped in followed by another equally tall but black and slender. Two more entered after them, then another pair. Six men stood in front of us occupying all the empty space in our sitting room, staring at us as if they had never seen a man and his beloved wife enjoying the success of their marriage. The leader took a step closer and asked, "Are you Adams?" Instantly I realized they were cops.

"Yah," I answered. The man produced a card which I didn't see very clearly because he had only flashed it. But somehow I knew it was genuine.

"I am superintendent Kioko of State Police. I have a warrant for your arrest". That was being too formal. I had had experiences with the police before this time but they never took the trouble of letting me know who they were and whether or not they had a warrant for my arrest. In other circumstances, most likely at this juncture I would have been sporting a bullet wound. So I didn't have cause for alarm.

"Reasons for my arrest, Mr. Superintendent?" I added some arrogance trying to prove to my wife that I was not the type of

guy who was pushed about by the police the way they pleased. But I wished I had kept my mouth shut. It was as if I had asked them whether they were armed. The next thing which happened instantly and was done simultaneously was to have three of the cops go for their guns and point them directly at my chest, at the position of the heart.

"Hands up." Superintendent Kioko ordered, then added, "Well, while we are at it, I am compelled to let you know that anything you say from now on may be used as evidence against you." It was terrible. A thing like this to happen before the eyes of your wife while there is nothing you can do about it. No matter how much I tried to convince myself that I would get away with whatever it was, I could not help observing the fact that a superintendent of police didn't personally go to make an

arrest unless he was positive it would result in a conviction. That rank alone told me I was sunk.

I hadn't obeyed the order by the time my son came crawling. He reached where I was before I stood up. The cops had given him room to get to me. I picked him up and stood. He held my neck with both hands, rested his head on my chest, and faced the enemies loathingly. Somehow, the reaction of the kid brought about some kind of an interval. As far as I was concerned, the kid had saved my life. After emerging from gaol I had sworn I'd never let them have me again. I would die where they found me and if possible go with one to hell, the only place I am sure they can have room for me. But no jail term for me again . . . never. But right then, with my own son in my hands I could not try anything. 'During my oath,' I argued with myself, 'I . . . I had not bargained on my son's life as well. After all, I hadn't known I would marry, have a son and be happy. When I had been taking the oath, life had lost meaning for me. I felt rejected and out of place even in normal circumstances. But after getting a nice job and abandoning my criminal past I

realized that the very people I thought and believed belonged to a different class, 'the upper class' as I termed it got some interest in me. Joy was one of them. For three years now, we had been together and between us had brought forward a third party. Right now I did not want to part with them, to part with my family as it was now. Even my death, I felt, would deny them of their beloved one, yet by then I would be comfortably stacked in hell. Knowing no pain, no hunger or suffering, no want for the cursed money which brought hatred in the whole universe, I would be there relaxing, waiting for my enemies to meet me in hell when their days, their happy days, came to an end. Then I would teach them a lesson. But now I wouldn't. I hated the idea of denying them my presence as much as I hated these six cops standing in front of me, aiming their tiny guns at my chest. I'd do my best to keep on living so that one day I would reunite with my family. Yes, I promise you beloved ones, I'll just keep on living because of you. I'll withstand all the problems before me because of you. Especially you Qithure - my son.' A different oath all together but one I decided

to stick to.

The superintendent talked again. "Hand over the baby to his mother." There was menace in his voice. I handed my son to his mother praying that I'd see him again . . . soon.

"Take two steps forward," he ordered again, pointing his gun where he wanted me to stand. I did so. Another cop who was not armed came forward. He produced some glittering metal which I knew too well in my life - the handcuffs.

The cold touch of metal round my wrists forced me to flash to my past. I saw the flogging given to me in jail, saw myself spread-eagled on a cross worse than the one they used for Jesus Christ. My hands and legs in cuffs fastened to the cross on four different points. I saw myself completely nude on the cross, prison guards surrounding me, some grinning, some smiling and others making hard faces to appear tough, but all having

one thing in common - enjoying my unfavourable state while one of them put the greatest effort to tear my buttocks into pieces with a cane. Bloody sadists! 'No, I just can't let this happen again. I'll have to withdraw this second oath. Yah! My dear Son of Fate, death is the only cure.' I told myself but I Knew deep inside me that I wouldn't. I was a changed family man. I was escorted to the waiting car and was ushered inside. Goodbye freedom!

Chapter One

The Kenya bus came to a stop and we all boarded. It was time to go, time to get deep into freedom and go far away from Kamiti Maximum Prison which had held us captives for what seemed to us like centuries.

We found a seat just next to the entrance and we made ourselves comfortable for the first time in eight years. The conductor reached us five minutes later. I dipped into my jacket's inner pocket and fished out a ten shilling note which I gave to the conductor with a gesture that it was for the four of us. He cast a quick experienced glance at us

and seemed to give us a message which to us was unintelligible. He put the money into his purse and turned right to continue with the second row of seats. There was very little we could do to stop him, so we only watched him as he continued with his job. Just opposite us, there were some ladies who were also travelling together. One paid for the rest and the conductor worked on his machine and gave them a ticket. Why hadn't he given us our ticket? I asked myself. Well, he had given us a gesture which seemed to tell us to wait but whatever for I could not comprehend since the money I had given him was just enough for the four of us to Kasarani. Why should we wait? He shouldered his way through the standing passengers and was swallowed up. I got him out of my mind. But what if he demanded more money? If he claimed that we hadn't paid since we didn't have a ticket? Would it mean going back to the loathsome prison we had just left? Back to the malicious and sadistic jailers? That alone made me shiver, knowing that if he demanded for more money from us we certainly wouldn't pay. But even with all those negative thoughts we still managed to get him out of our minds. There was much

to be admired and speculated about in this free world we had just joined - so we continued doing so.

We reached Kasarani and got up to alight. There was no change we were expecting and at the same time there wasn't ticket inspection so there was no point in waiting. We had reached our destination which was all that counted. As we alighted the conductor approached me and gave a five shilling coin. He pressed my palm and as he did so winked at me, a gesture that seemed to thank me for my cooperation. I snatched the coin and put it in my pocket with lightning speed, now understanding the conductor and pitying him at the same time. It was quite a way of earning an extra shilling. But one thing beat me as much as it surprised me - what criteria was the conductor applying to tell those who would take such a bargain and those who wouldn't? Or did we look that desperate? As much as I despised the thought, I was forced to accept the truth. We were poor and looked old fashioned which wasn't surprising considering where we had just left. I smiled weakly for nothing at all, this was society we had just joined and we

were going to do our best to match up with it. But what a pity? Corruption even on a bus? I found myself wondering for how long I was going to survive if the cost of living had reached a level where even a bus conductor was forced to x:heat.

I parted with my friends. A few minutes later I boarded a bus for Murang'a. It took the Isuzu bus less than an hour to cover the one hundred kilometres to Murang'a. Sometime back, I remembered, it would have taken a bus that size well over two hours to cover the same distance. While I admired the modern technology, I loathed the thought of the repercussions should the bus have a head on collision or simply lose control. It would be a day dream to expect survivors. What a pity it would be to leave jail and walk straight to your funeral, straight into a grave.

Tiyakihai, Kaweru, Wathenge, Qaitheri na Kiriani." A

manamba was calling repeatedly as if he was computerized. I listened carefully; yes my destination was towards that side if my people hadn't shifted. They'd drop me in Qaitheri from where I'd walk for fifteen minutes to my real home.

The manamba insisted that there was one unoccupied seat to be filled before the matatu would take off. He was looking at me suspiciously so I went on board expecting the matatu to take off immediately. But even thirty minutes later it still had one more vacant seat. Yet, after me, there had entered four more passengers who were half seated or standing. The tout was still hanging on the matatits body, hitting it and demanding one more passenger. We started complaining about heat and discomfort in the hooded body that had very few ventilations. Word reached the tout and afraid of the outcome he called the driver.

The driver, a short, thin dark youngster whom the passengers referred to as Wagachiku went behind the wheel. Those who seemed to know him sighed with relief and unanimously agreed that with Wagachiku driving, it would take them under thirty minutes to have the last passenger dropped at his destination. I nodded in agreement when they faced me, not to look out of place despite the fact that I had never

set my eyes on the teenager. It was most likely that when they put me in, the teenage driver was still suckling.

As we negotiated innumerable comers, each time the wheels screeching with protest at the high speed, I found myself contradicting everyone else in the vehicle. The speed was incredible. To me the driver seemed not to realize he was responsible for over twenty five lives. Everybody enjoyed the safari except me. Ten minutes and the matatu arrived at my destination. Thirty kilometres in ten minutes! I glanced at my watch as I stepped out of the hooded body. It was a terrible speed given that the matatu was making stops on the way. I found myself wondering, for the second time, whether I was

going to get away all in one piece with my pessimistic outlook. Had the prison walls managed to plant jitters in me after all? I wondered.

I hang my safari bag on my shoulders and looked around me. It was several years since I sighted the beautiful physical features of this area. The tall trees along the road produced plenty of fresh oxygen which I inhaled and enjoyed with a sense of freedom. It was good to be home again, good to look around and realize there weren't prison wardens holding batons and pushing me with them on my ribs. There was no one around to tell me that my time to sleep was due whether I had sleep or not. Nobody to lock the door from without so that even if fire broke out I wouldn't escape from it. This made me realize how important freedom was.

I turned right crossed the main road and took a dirt road towards where I belonged. I saw groups of people around the shopping centre. They were all looking at me as if they weren't sure I wasn't a monkey in human clothes. If they recognized me after so many years I didn't care. I only gave them a side glance and as far as I was concerned, they did not exist.

I passed a coffee factory where again I met groups of people who were breaking out of a meeting. Like the others, they stopped talking to stare at me. Tools,' I thought. 'Don't they have anything better to do than to stare?' I was pleased when I managed to get out of their sight.

After negotiating a second comer on the road, I came face to face with where I belonged - a three acre strip of land. At the top, there were about ten grass thatched houses. Immediately below them, there were about five huts, also grass thatched. I needed no explanation. The large houses belonged to my eight brothers, my mother and a sister whom men had found fair not to marry but give more children than she could feed. The huts I guessed belonged to my nephews who must have grown up.

All these houses and huts were so close together they were like a village. All those human beings depended on that tiny strip of land which, to make the matter worse, had the larger part filled with coffee trees and tea. How much those cash crops fetched was something I could not tell, and what beat me most was why they let stand worthless trees which consumed more of their time than the money they fetched. I just then remembered that sometime back one of my brothers had told me it wasn't my business when I tried to explain the need for food crops so I dismissed the issue from my mind.

The house at the top-most belonged to my dead father- Qod rest his soul. It was different from the others in that it was roofed with corrugated iron sheets though in later years, it seemed they had put grass in some places probably where it had started leaking as a result of leaning on one side. I moved straight to the one where my mother now lived.

There wasn't a single adult at home when I arrived. As I passed to get to my dead father's house, children who I estimated to be between two to five years ran to their houses and locked themselves inside. Some were screaming while others cried loudly. What a welcome! Those who were mature enough came to me when I sat on a form outside the house. They greeted me in a friendly manner though I was sure they didn't know I was their true uncle. Looking at the dozens of children, there only came one thing in my mind - pity. The children looked completely desolate, in despair as if they were all suffering from kwashiokor. 'Christ!' I called inwardly, 'Behold Miie grandsons of a freedom fighter.'

As we continued talking, all the children who had ran away joined us. They had realized I wasn't a cannibal. In about fifteen minutes, I had almost all nieces and nephews before me. When I counted their heads without letting them know I was doing it, I got up to thirty seven - a full classroom. But only about ten had

ever attended school. Those who were under five years were either completely nude or had tattered vests bigger than their sizes. Those above five, were lucky to have worn-out shirts but no shorts. What was most pathetic was the health of the children. Some could not move properly as a result of being infested by jiggers. They looked like hooligans. It was like an orphanage, the only difference being that the latter is a cleaner place and the children are taken care of. But what could I do about it?

Their parents, who I already knew and had gone for the meeting I had witnessed on my way, started arriving at around 6.30 pm. Each mother who arrived called her children and some were even given a beating for coming to me. By 7.00 pm I was all alone outside my mother's house. Mo brother came to see me and I could guess by 9.30 pm all had arrived and had certainly known of my arrival. Mother didn't come home that night of all days, neither did my spinster sister. So I had no option but to seek refuge in an unfinished kitchen outside my mother's house. I could tell the kitchen was being used because the only thing that lacked in the cow-shed-like kitchen was the door. I gathered some pieces of firewood and using a lighter I had, made some fire. I had taken a heavy lunch and I still felt okay. It had been a heavy meal after a long time and my digestive system needed time to deal with the excess. In any case I had no option even if I was to get hungry. It was quite obvious that none of my brothers wanted anything to do with me. I had given myself time to think and had put myself in each of my brothers' boots. Mere they were, burdened with children they could hardly manage. All of them depended on that tiny strip of land with less than one and a half acres where they could grow crops for their subsistence. Having no jobs and little to do on the strip of land when they weren't harvesting, picking tea and coffee, they resorted to going to the shopping centre for rumour mongering. This made them

all the more miserable. So the idea of a jail-bird

joining them, helpless as he must be, and probably demanding his share of the strip of land was certainly the most unwelcome idea in their lives. I couldn't blame them. If there was anyone to blame, it was our parents. Why give birth to so many children as though they were competing with the world? Or would it have been different if our father was alive? Why did he have to go to the forest to fight? What good did it do him or his wife and children? I lit a third cigarette and decided to forget the whole thing. One thing was certain now - I didn't have brothers. Yes, even parents for that matter. The last time I had seen my mother was ten years ago. How would I know she still existed?

By 12.30 am I had had enough of the fire and was now dozing. Rain had started falling accompanied by lightning and terrible thunderclaps. I pushed the form against the wooded wall and using my bag to act as a pillow I lay on the form facing where the ceiling was supposed to be. The fire had gone off and I was now in full darkness, darkness that I almost felt since I wasn't used to it. I had just arrived from a place where darkness was the greatest enemy. Lights remained on throughout the night lest you think of cutting the thick iron bars and release yourself before your time. At intervals, lightning would appear and light up every corner in the tiny kitchen. Heavy rain had now started falling and a wild dog, I think a jackal, had decided to seek shelter in the same room with me. Probably sensing my presence it decided to know whether I was alive with an idea of good midnight supper in its mind. The lightning coincided with the beast's movement and my open eyes. In fright I jumped off the form and reached for a piece of wood that was handy to fight it out with the beast. But by the moment the lightning lit up the room, I was all alone. The beast, like me had sensed danger and taken off. With this experience in mind, it was not easy to go back to sleep. I lit another fire and devoted the few hours to dawn warming myself and chain-smoking.

The chirping of birds that morning was the best thing that happened to me since leaving gaol. I listened to one, then another joined in the

music and a third one followed suit. Then in the next five minutes I was listening to the greatest music combination I had heard in years. The combination of those sounds made a great heavenly song. After a cigarette I took my bag and went down the strip of land to a stream which was at the bottom of the land. I washed my face, though I hadn't slept, took out a comb I had made in gaol and I used it to make my hair look tidy.

From where I stood I could see all the houses' front doors. Although I had no intentions of talking to any of my brothers, I just wanted them to know that I had noticed their attitude towards me. I wanted them to know that I quite understood they didn't want me and that as far as I was concerned they would cease to exist the moment I turned my back on them. That was to be the sign of the death of the unity between me and them, the brotherhood would be a matter of the past. I would never step on their tiny piece of land which had made my own brothers disown me. I waited patiently until each of the brothers came face to face with me. With all of them standing outside their houses facing me about a hundred metres away, I turned and left.

The bag was hanging on my left shoulder as I walked leisurely back to Qaitheri with my entire treasure on this earth. If somebody grabbed it and fled, he would have reduced me to nothing - zero. It happened to be the most cared for possession under the current circumstances. The bag had spent a stretch with me in gaol. In it there were four pairs of long trousers, six shirts, a few underpants, a shaving kit, three T-shirts, two sweaters and a leather jacket. That was all I had in this world. I reached Qaitheri just as a matatu stopped to pick two other passengers and I became the third.

I hit the streets of Nairobi at precisely 11.30 am. This was where I had spent most of my life, where I had experienced the greatest joy, but also the same place where my sorrowful life took shape. There was very little I didn't know of this city. But this time things were a bit different. I didn't have a job, I didn't have any means of earning a living. The newspaper I used to write for couldn't touch me. I was hotter than an iron bar because of my previous conviction. For no

reason that I could tell, everybody who knew me in the past avoided me like cancer. I was a lone wolf. In my pockets I had some six hundred shillings, the very amount I had gone in with. I was aware it wasn't going to last a lifetime but that didn't worry me. I had learned the secret of life - to live each day as it came. I had found it foolish to think about tomorrow. From my experiences I know this day we call 'tomorrow' is always open to millions of things, including death, and worse than that deprivation of freedom - I mean imprisonment. Death is far much better than the latter.

The first thing that came into my mind as I walked along the street was to find somewhere to sleep. I knew the most dangerous and risky thing in this city was to get stranded in the streets during the night. If you were lucky to avoid robbers, you walked right into the hands of night-patrol-cops, then if you didn't have some bucks to spare, you spent a night in their free 'guest-houses', then there v^as the fine or jail, if not both. With this awful knowledge in mind, I flashed back to my past and thought of where there were cheapest lodgings. I remembered 'Harambee Lodgings.' These lodgings were as odd as their name. What you paid for was the bed but not the room. A room had five to six beds and you didn't choose your room-mates. You had to be very careful in these rooms, most of whose occupants were hoodlums. All categories from pick-pockets, car breakers to violent robbers. Mo one knew about these lodgings without first knowing how to block a punch and throw one. It was the rule in 'ML', the short name for Harambee Lodgings.

I went up River Road and reached Tea Room. I turned right towards Kirinyaga Road, turned right again into an alley leading to the bottom of the lodgings. I went upstairs and met the manager. He looked at me suspiciously. What was going on in his mind was better known to himself, but I thought that he was trying to figure out where he had seen me. There was that confused look on his face. Me had seen me alright but I wasn't going to remind him. It would only make him have a low opinion of me. As for myself, I remembered him very well. I guess more than he would want anybody to know. He was the greatest fence in the city centre. Whatever was stolen and didn't get an immediate buyer, he was ever ready to buy. From snatched watches to

motor vehicle spares, videos and television sets. He was lucky to have got away with it all that long. But the reason had to be the fact that he helped hoodlums whenever they had problems so they had to keep him a secret.

I took out a hundred shilling note and put it on the table before him.

"One week," I said

"Five days," he corrected me.

I looked at him closely and noticed uncertainty on his face. I knew I could bargain so I repeated, "I said a week and you jolly well know it's enough. Think I am new around this joint?" I put the bag down which he looked at curiously no doubt expecting to buy something from it within minutes. He took the money and wrote a receipt for one week. As he handed it over he asked, "What do we have there?" He gestured at the bag.

"Later, boss, later." I read the receipt, saw the room number I was to share with unknown comrades and moved towards it. nothing had changed about the lodgings and to show him I was familiar with the arrangement, I moved to 'our' room to take a strategic position, the best, before anyone else.

The sight of the bed made me feel tired. I remembered I

hadn't slept for over twenty four hours. The day prior to my release I could not sleep awaiting freedom the following day. I decided to have a nap before I went out for supper. I hadn't taken lunch, but the moment I decided to stay in these lodgings I at the same time decided to adhere to its rules - the rules of the poor. The number one rule being that those who stayed in this joint ate once a day. So there was no thinking about lunch. I knew where I would go for supper at around 6.00 pm and then get back to sleep. I remembered the bag with my treasure. It was to be part of myself for as long as I stayed in this joint. Here you never took off your clothes. You either slept in them or on them. Even the bag was to be my pillow. Among the items inside would be the very

shoes I was wearing. You don't leave your shoes on the floor by your bed if you want to keep them. They'll just disappear and if your roommate picks them and gives them to the manager for fifty shillings, the fence will take them without a second thought. I took off the shoes and put them in the bag. I put the bag under my head, tying its long sling around my neck and then passing it under my left armpit. That way I knew it was safe because one had to wake me up before getting the bag. not that it couldn't happen, it was just to keep me aware that somebody was interested. In two minutes I was in dreamland .

I woke up with a start and reached for my bag. It was there alright, all was safe. But I hadn't been startled by nothing. My old instincts of a hunted man were wholly awake. They became alert the moment I resumed this kind of life which I had abandoned at the age of twenty-five. I was now thirty-five.

I looked up and saw a man who had just entered coming directly to the bed next to mine. The heads of the two beds met at the same point, the furthest corner of the room. Like me, the new arrival wanted to secure a bed at the corner where he could easily observe whoever entered. I looked at my watch and saw that it was 5.45 pm. I had slept for over five hours. I sat up and

faced the man. I noticed he was smiling but wasn't facing me. Something looked familiar about him. I was sure I had met him before, sometime back, only I couldn't remember where. Could it be in gaol? Was he a cook there? But one thing was certain about our meeting. Wherever I had met this man it wasn't anywhere in the Mairobi streets during my crime days. I had been away from the streets for a long time and I couldn't have recognized those I used to meet or move about with. He was of medium height, round face, and as healthy as he looked handsome. He turned to face me, the broad smile still on his face. He said, "A wary old fox, aren't you. That's the rule in Heich El." His teeth completed the picture. He had a gap between the front upper teeth which almost everybody admired. I had met him in prison remand and he was the prisoner in-charge of the ward. Whether or not he got away with his case of an attempted

robbery, I couldn't tell simply because I had left him there. It was so many years between now and then.

I struggled to get his name and just when I was about to give up, his nickname hazily struck my mind. "Hello, Capone. It's a long time since we met." Whether that surprised him or not he didn't show. But that didn't surprise me either. I knew that very few things surprised criminals. As he answered, I jumped out of the bed.

"Yah, it is quite some time," he said as if he remembered clearly when we had last met. I was sure he hadn't but I wasn't going to remind him. "When did you get out?" he continued. Like me, he had guessed there was only one place where we could have met - behind bars. Yet still, there was the possibility he remembered me just as I had.

"Yesterday," I answered.

"Two weeks ago. It's a crazy place this, but at least it is good to be free," he told me. I knew right then that we were sailing in similar boats in one gigantic ocean.

"I can do with some food/ I told him. "I have just arrived. Would you recommend a nice place for me?"

"Arrived from? I thought you said yesterday," he asked for an answer.

"From home, and man, no one wants to see me there."

"Oh yah, I can understand. People like a person when you are having money. When you go home and buy presents for everybody from father to son. Buy them clothes and pay school fees for their children, beer to those who drink and the like. They get to their feet when you cough, everyone then wants you to be his guest. Wait till you get broke or worse, you get nabbed and sent to gaol, none knows you then. Sometimes I feel like gunning the whole dammed lot." I noticed bitterness in him as he talked. Later he suggested we go for supper.

"I haven't had a meal for the past thirty six hours either, and I am

damn hungry. I spent last night in a police cell. I have just paid a fine for being drunk and disorderly. And you know what?" he added after a pause, "the last time I tasted alcohol of any kind was five years ago." That told me a lot. It was another way of telling me that since he left prison two weeks ago he had not tasted beer and that he served a sentence of five solid years. Considering that he might have been given what we call remission in prison, then there was no doubt that the judge had given him a sentence of about eight years.

I took my bag and as usual hang it on my shoulder. My idea was to carry it along with me. As we passed the manager's office Capone asked me, "What's the idea, Sheriff?" This was a common nickname used by criminals who didn't remember each other's name. "You want to drag this bag along with you?"

"What else can I do? You know as much as I do that you can't leave anything behind in these lodgings," I said, genuinely not aware of any option.

"Leave it with Maish."

"And who the hell is Maish?" I asked.

He looked at me like he thought I was stupid. I could see he was surprised that I didn't know who Maish was. Instead of answering, he reached for the bag which I released immediately. He opened the manager's office calling, "Maish, keep this bag together with mine. If it gets lost or someone opens it and any single item gets lost, you had better get lost too before we are back." He left the office and joined me. I had found a good pal.

I followed Capone down River Road. He was a man who never appeared to be in a hurry, which too was the manner in which he spoke. We crossed Ronald Mgala street, came to OTC building and went ahead and crossed Nairobi River near the Country bus stop and entered Qikomba. Here we left the road and entered an alley which took us to a kiosk hidden by heaps of timber along the road. There were no proper seats. Those we found there were sitting either on logs,

tins or disposed off old tyres. There were plenty of people all feeding on one type of food - ugali. When I looked closely I saw necks and legs of chickens. We called them 'michugi' in general. A lump of ugali which was badly cooked, a cup of soup, (served in a kimbo tin) one leg and one neck cost three shillings and fifty cents. Honestly, it was a meal that satisfied your hunger and of course was delicious if you were hungry. That was the kind of life I was ready for.

I paid for the supper for both of us. My friend bought cigarettes and we left. The street lights were now on. Without wasting time or loitering in the town, we decided to go straight to our beds. We would talk and get to know each other better before the others arrived.

We didn't talk much about ourselves when we got back. None seemed to want to confide in the other, except that we knew we were both in gaol at the same time or period - no one knew what the other was doing. Criminals didn't fancy trusting everybody they met or they thought they knew, so we talked

over general events. Up to now he hadn't even known what name to call me and as a result he had nicknamed me 'Chief Munaa' a very common name in prison intended to mean trouble shooter. From the look of this friend of mine and the manner in which he chose words when talking, I could deduce he was most likely a conman. Having done a jail term for an attempted robbery wouldn't necessarily mean that he was a robber and as for me I did not even know what to call myself. But one thing was now certain - I wasn't a criminal. However, that didn't mean that I could not throw a punch or use threatening language. I was good at both.

At around 10.30 pm the door was violently pushed inward and three gentlemen came into view. The lights were still on as we had not slept. In fact we had given each other a break to think while we tried to get some sleep, so this violent entry startled both of us. None of us left his bed. We were both in positions where we could watch the drama best. The characters entered. Between the two of them was a third who seemed so drunk that he couldn't stand on his own. They released him when he got to an empty bed. The sod didn't stay where he was.

Immediately, he stood up and started staggering to where we were. "My bed is at the corner and whoever is there should get off.* It was my corner he was interested in, a fatal choice. "If you are not getting out of the bed then be ready to share it with me," the sod continued.

His comrades weren't doing anything to stop him. Instead they encouraged him by saying, "You can sleep where you want - this is HL." I realized they too were drunk. I waited for the drunkard to bend towards my bed. I had decided what to do the moment his companions started talking dirty. As he touched the bed, I gave him a mule's kick on the chest which sent him backwards like he had been hit by an electric current. He fell on the feet of his pals and by that moment my feet touched the floor, because I knew what was to follow.

The following thirty minutes brought the manager and his two bouncers into our room. The sod was still on the floor vomiting the mixture of chang'aa, herbs, chibuku and probably the little beer he had taken to cover up the horrible stench of the local brew. What had now brought the manager was the fight which had erupted as a result of the sod's interest to share a bed with me.

Capone was a terrible fighter, a thing I had guessed the moment I set sight on his structure. He had come to my rescue when the other two landed on me. He had taken one and I had taken the other. Despite their drunkardness the beasts could fight, but it was certain they were fighting a losing battle. We were too good for them especially because we were sober.

We relaxed the fight when we saw the manager. We knew he would take over since it was certain that the drunkards weren't going to give up. As it turned out to be we were right. The manager got one of the stronger of the two and the next moment the bouncers took over. Fights in HL were common but they were calmed down as easily as they erupted.

Life in HL was a repetition of events. It was a matter of moving from there to the 'michugi kiosk' in the morning and evening.

Capone, like me, didn't care about tomorrow. His theory was that each day had it's own functions. He believed that there wasn't a single day that one did the same things he did the previous day. not even by plan. "You can never trace your previous day's footsteps and follow them again. You can't talk the same words with the same people. Every goddam thing is different, so is life each day," he argued.

We didn't have a way of making an earning. We were capitalizing on what each had, believing that tomorrow would be different. So by the third week in HL we were almost broke. I for one had about a hundred and fifty shillings only and given that

I was spending a pound daily, I had exactly about seven days before I went flat.

I decided to quit that kind of life since it was too expensive for me. So one morning, I woke Capone who used to sleep up to around 7.30 am. I checked my watch and saw it was fifteen minutes to seven.

"What's it, Chief? You want to go to some place this early?*

"No,* I said taking out a twenty shilling note to give him. "I cannot afford this luxury any more. I am quitting."

I stretched my hand to give him the pound. Me just looked at it then at me and asked, "And what the hell are you being so generous about? Why the money?"

"My friend, don't you really understand? What haven't I told you about myself? I have no where to go from here. I have no home. I am trying my luck in 'missing line'," I said. "That's the only place for me. And if I must spell it out to you, I wanna snatch a blanket from here. . ."

"That is not the question. Why the money?" he interrupted.

"Look man, you'll be forced to answer a few questions when I am gone because a blanket and a sheet will be missing. The pound may encourage you not to know anything. On the other hand . . ."

"Have you gone out of your wits, Sheriff? Is that the best understanding you have about me? Listen, you need your pound more than I do, and for your information you can take whatever you want. I am not the caretaker in this joint but if you are joining the parking boys you had better have special clothes for yourself. What you wear here does not belong to that class, not unless you don't mind being strangled during the night."

I still had a day in this comfort so I decided to spend it. That morning I went to see a friend I had met by chance as I left the lodging. We had met in gaol and become friends. I went to the meeting place, the Cafe de Paris. I was about to enter when I

heard someone call me. I almost ignored the caller because he was seated on a stool a brush in his hands so I thought he had seen a customer in me. A second glance told me it was the friend I was meeting.

For no reason, this second meeting made me feel so happy. I extended my hand excitedly which he stood and shook. He was as happy as I was. next to him there was another stool which he tapped with his right hand and said, "Welcome, sit here." Just then, a customer arrived who chose to sit on the stool in front of me and stepped on the stand. My friend rescued me by telling him I was his visitor. The man apologetically changed places. Within two hours I counted and found that my friend had made thirty three shillings. Me had shined shoes for eleven people paying an average of three shillings each. My friend at this juncture took me to the cafe where he ordered some tea for both of us. It was like day dreaming. Tea at Cafe de Paris ! I couldn't remember clearly when I had entered that joint last. It was now far much above my class.

When we got back I had changed my thinking about life. That meeting had made me realize something I had never thought about. How many people even in those big offices surrounding us made an average of twenty shilling an hour like Papa? Why did I think that I could only make money by writing? Why did I feel lost and desperate just because the newspapers I used to write for could not take my stories? Who on

earth said that you had to have an office so as to be somebody? We reached the stools just as I made up my mind that I should not expect manna to fall from heaven like it happened in the time of Moses. I had to do something . . . anything.

I had nowhere to go so I kept my friend company. On three occasions, there came two people together who wanted their shoes polished. I had spent enough time studying how my friend was doing it so instead of letting the customers move away, I

took the necessary action. By the time I was polishing for the third customer, my friend was certain I could do well. There was nothing to it anyway. On the other hand very few customers notice bad polishing. I never noticed when I was in that class years back.

The knowledge leathered that day had very much to do with what followed. I always knew the most well informed people about the streets are the shoe shiners. As we talked about various topics, I came to understand that there wasn't a single parking boy, begger, blind, deaf, or disabled person in the streets. I had also noticed some cleanliness which was unusual but hadn't bothered to speculate about it. My friend told me.

"There are some people calling themselves NQO who are coming. I don't know what kind of people they ..."

"Non Governmental Organizations," I interrupted. "What about them?"

"They are having a week's meeting here in Nairobi. This is why you can't spot a single beggar around. They will spend the whole week in police cells till the meeting is over."

"Just move around town this evening, you won't see a single person sleeping on the pavements. Those who know move to the suburbs temporarily till the visitors are gone."

"Christ," I said and kept silent. My friend didn't know that this

knowledge meant I was going to spend another one hundred shillings in the luxury I had in the morning decided I could not afford.

As we parted that evening, Papa, my friend gave me five shillings.

"You have surely earned that money. Will you come tomorrow, even if for a talk? I like your company."

"I will, no doubt," I answered. I needed his company more than he did mine, only he didn't know. That evening I bought Capone supper as I narrated the day's discoveries.

As Papa had said, there wasn't a single person sleeping in the pavement that week. I had made various visits in the streets up to 8.00 pm and witnessed it. Then on the twelfth day, they started arriving. I visited River Road where there was a group I was proposing to join in two days' time and found my comrades to be. There was, I had come to learn, a person who was in charge of the lodges of that area in particular. He was about fifty years old and had stayed in that area for the past twenty-three years according to him. This is the man I had to see if I wanted a vacancy. This man was taking care of the shops around that area. If any shop was broken into, he would be the person to be asked. He had therefore to know every lodger in that area and you could not be allowed to spend the night in the area before you consulted Saleh. I gave him a tip of five shillings telling him that I would join him in a day or two. I was going to join him, there was no doubt about that, as I could not afford living any other way.

It wasn't bad after all. Within the third day, I had realized I could cope with 'missing line' and the possible neighbours. Capone wasn't like me. Although he didn't let me know how, I was sure he was making a living out of something. I still thought he was a conman. Sometimes he would pass around and throw five shillings my way but never talked. The day, I left HL, Capone had sworn that one day he would come for me from 'missing line' and we would live like lords. He had sworn twice about it before I left. But he could not tell me how we would make all that money. As for me, living like a lord was one thing that could never ever cross my mind. That to me was building castles in the

air and that was one game which I never played; to me that was all Utopia. I was happier this way than I was months ago behind bars.

For a month, I continued meeting my friend Papa. Sometimes I made as much as fifteen shillings especially when it was

muday. Compared to my 'veranda mates' I was a rich man. I had automatically gained respect and was given the best comer. I was the only one with a blanket and a bed sheet, things unknown in 'missing lines'. Some even proposed I should marry. Two of my neighbours were married for five years and had two children. Every morning, the father would lead his blind wife and children to their begging place. He would leave them there and take a polythene bag which he would fill with food left over from hotels. It was only in the evening when they'd sit together and eat. Even the children had gotten used to one meal. When Saleh suggested marriage, I retorted saying I'd think about it then forgot the issue. Marriage in a street? That was just crazy.

Problems started when I went to meet Papa as usual. Me was nowhere to be seen. For the first time since he introduced me to the job, he hadn't turned up. Me did not come back - ever. I was back to square zero, worse than I ever was. Then the worst happened. Saleh, who during the day put on a brown dusty coat and was in charge of the parking ground around QPO, came and told me he wanted to have a word with me. It was early in the morning. I thought he wanted to borrow five shillings from me as was the habit and which he never paid back, but it wasn't that. This time he had news - bad news. He asked me, "Do you know what OAU is?"

"Yes, it means Organization of African Unity. What about it?"

"They are meeting here in Mairabi within a week from now."

"So? What has it to do with me?" I asked, surprised that he

had to give me such news which had nothing to do with me and my style of living.

"Oh, I am sorry you are new here therefore you don't know, from tomorrow or the day after, there will be a clean up in the city for all of us." I remembered. How stupid of me to have forgotten such an important thing? What was I going to do? I thought. I had no money, no way of earning even a single meal.

I couldn't even afford the michugi and now there was the crackdown. I was beaten, completely beaten. I felt like committing suicide.

"What can you advise me to do?" I asked honestly. I badly needed his advice.

"Can't you think of a place where you can go for two weeks?"

"Jesus! For two weeks? All that long? I don't know where I can go for three days. I am being very honest with you, Saleh. I do not have even a penny in my pockets. Is there any way you can help me? I'll soon starve to death."

I shouldn't have confided in him that much. The moment he realized that I was totally helpless, that I wasn't the tycoon they thought I was, his respect for me dropped like a glass on hard floor and broke into pieces. I could read that clearly on his face and from his sadistic smile without him telling me. I knew he wasn't going to help me. To prove me right he asked, "Don't you have a friend who can lend you some money? Friends come in handy at times like this," he smiled.

"Sadistic bastard," I called him. I held him by the neck and gave him several pushes while throwing bitter words at him. I slapped him on the face. I was so furious I wanted to give him a punch. I managed to hold my temper. I took up my bag and looked around me. It was still too early to start window shopping although people had started moving up and down the streets particularly those who had arrived early by night buses from other towns. I crossed River Road just opposite Mew Kaka Day and Night Club. I turned to the left and turned to Tea Room. There operated an all night open air street cafe. It always opened at around 8.30 pm to 6.45 am. It was on the verandah of a retail shop, just a few yards from the road. It had only

one table, a portable one, whose work was to hold cups and buttered toasts called 'bandika'. All patrons were served while standing, nothing else was sold; black coffee and 'bandika' for both the poor and the rich.

The smell of coffee hit my nostrils as I passed by. For the first time I felt I needed to have a cupful. I had some coins remaining, the entire fortune which I hoped to keep a secret even to myself. I found I had four shillings and fifty cents. I turned back, went and stood by the charcoal burner and putting my bag down, I ordered a cup of coffee and one bandika. I was going to buy myself what I had first admired that morning without thinking about the consequences. When I finished what I termed as the greatest breakfast in a lifetime, I fought strongly the thought of sneaking away- to eat my cake and still have it. But these street business women know every trick. Reading my mind the proprietor extended her hand towards me and I paid. I had instantly wasted extravagantly three shillings and fifty cents. I bought four Rooster cigarettes with the remaining bob, lit one and went away.

I went upstairs and got Maish preparing to go out for breakfast. Like everybody else in the neighbourhood, Maish woke up early and because he could afford it, went for breakfast before the street cafes closed for the day. Our eyes met and he smiled. He knew a customer when he saw one. Before anything else I asked, "Is Capone around?" I had remembered his promise, 'One day I'll come for you from 'missing line' and we shall live like lords. Have you ever thought of what you can do with five hundred thousand shillings.' He had smiled then repeated, 'Half a million shillings?'

I hadn't taken him seriously however, especially when he mentioned hundred of thousands or halves of millions. To me those were day dreams, dreams which couldn't even cross my mind night or day. But Capone could help me. Not with thousands or with living like a lord, but with very little which to me would be very much - to give me accommodation for two

weeks, or an idea of what I could do for such a time and get away from the looming crackdown.

"Capone hasn't been in for over one week. Is there anything I can do for you?" he asked as he looked at his watch. It was apparent he was in a hurry and wanted me to know it.

The moment Saleh started enjoying my problems and I blasted him, I knew right away I had lost his friendship and honour. I also knew that after this, I was to be thrown out of the 'missing line' even after the things had cooled down. Two things therefore immediately crossed my mind. One of them was to seek help from Capone, and the result as you can see, was negative. The second option, which I reluctantly accepted, was selling the items in the bag on my shoulders. I had to sell a few so as to push myself a few days ahead - towards my extreme end. Among the things I possessed, there were two things I could not part with under any circumstances. The watch and the lighter. Somehow these two items managed psychologically to keep me in contact with my dead father. I had not got them from him, but they did remind me of him whenever I saw them and that pleased me. I flashed at my life ten years back and saw how I got them. I and a friend of mine were in urgent need of a car. Incidentally we had lost the master key which we used to pick cars with so we had to hijack one.

I had taken a gun and gone to City Park where I knew most aliens went for picnics. I had selected a novel 'Across the Bridge' by M. Qicheru which I would read while I waited. I found a Peugeot 504 parked under a palm tree and I decided I would wait for the owner of the car, whoever it was. So I went a few steps away from the car and sat under another tree and took out the book to read while I waited. I was almost giving up when I saw two figures appear from behind some bushes that surrounded a flower garden. One was white and the other black. Seeing me, the black decided not to come closer.

I suspected he was what they call in American slang, a faggot - a homosexual, so I hated him and forgot about him. What was it to me anyway? The white approached me without caution. I watched him over the book as he got into my trap.

"Hello." He waved at me as he reached the door to his car.

'You think I am another one,' I asked myself inwardly. 'You will soon know all blacks are not the same/

I stood up just as he opened the door, my gun in hand. "Hold it! And mind how you react. I am not the friend you've just been kissing." By then I was only about six feet away.

"Insert the ignition key and leave it there." He complied. "Qood! Mow move three steps away from the car." He was holding a packet of cigarettes in his left hand. When he put it down I noticed the gas lighter. It glittered as if it was made of pure gold. He noticed my attention and decided to put it in his pocket. I said, "Put the lighter there as well. I feel rich today."

He put it down. In the process I noticed the watch, a very attractive one. I demanded for it also.

"That watch, sir, take it off without argument. I'll claim you the most cooperative victim I've ever come across. I promise you no harm at all."

"Please, I'll . . ."

"That will come later, boss. Just do as I say. Snap it!" I ordered menacingly .

Reluctantly he took off the watch and put it on the driver's seat. I ordered him to move away, which he did. I moved towards the car. As I entered, I heard the white man appeal sympathetically, "Please, that watch is a present from my mother.. . she's dead. Let me keep it."

"I am sorry, boss," I mocked. "I'll give you five thousand shillings for it, please."

I got out, gun levelled at the centre of his chest. I had noticed a pouch protruding from his buttocks but had not thought about it. Mow I did. "Take out the pouch and throw it here."

He hesitated. I moved my gun just slightly and he threw the pouch down. I picked it and entered the car. Before I closed the door I remember telling him, "Do you want to know something, friend? My daddy was a freedom fighter. Know what happened to him? He was shot dead by a white man when I was only five years old. I'd have gotten education and probably a good job. I also don't like the way I make a living. It is a bit risky. That is why I hate whites."

"But I am not a Briton I am a German. Read the back of the watch to confirm it. I was probably five years when all that happened."

"I have no doubt about that boss. But you are white which to me is all the same. My friend consider yourself a very lucky man, that you've met me in the best of my moods. If the idea of revenge touches my mind you'll be the most unfortunate person. This watch will always remind me of my daddy, whom you killed." I could tell from his eyes that he took me seriously. He started moving away from possible revenge. I locked the

door and took off.

* * *

"I can see you are in a hurry so you don't have to keep on looking at your watch. I just need some two minutes." I told Maish when he glanced at his watch for the second time. When I kept the bag on his office table, I saw him relax. The hurry to go was replaced by a hurry to have the bag opened, expose the treasure for him so that he would pick what was good for him to buy. What was 'good' for Maish was anything he would fetch an extra shilling on or whatever old thing that would save him from buying a new one. Because of my fury with Saleh, I had forgotten several, very important things. I had turned and carried my bag just as it was, heading for Maish' office. When I unzipped the bag pouring the contents out of it, the first two items to land on the table were the bedsheet and the blanket I had stolen from this

same guest house. How careless of me! If Maish picked the phone and called the police, I could be given a prison sentence of not less than

eighteen months. But I had a feeling Maish wouldn't do that. He was a criminal as well but even with that assumption I was put completely on the defensive. There was only one way of dealing with that kind of a situation and I tried it.

"Look here, mister, it was just the other day you wanted to know what was contained in this bag and when I now open it you stand there staring at me agape as if I am holding a gun on you." I talked non-stop not giving him time to recover from the shock. I continued, "Mow look, if you are not interested I'll just pack and go. I spot a thief, get hold of him, recover your stolen property and immediately I do so I come to see you. Mow instead of giving me a tip for the work done you just stand there with your eyes and mouth wide open as if you are staring at a ghost." At least he managed a smile. He had of course discovered the irony.

"You've got strong guts, Chief," he said using Capone's nickname for me. "You get yourself caught red-handed and you still try to bully me? These items disappeared the same day as you, just as their reappearance. Talk business or I'll call the police to settle this matter," he threatened.

"Go ahead and call them," I retorted. "But if I were you, I'd, before anything else, get rid of the things you bought the other day. Just call them and we see who'll get seven years for handling stolen property!"

I had caught him off balance. In underground activities the underdog in such an encounter is the one who has committed more crimes. Again he smiled, this time ironically. A smile I never try to underrate.

"Okay! okay! I am sure you didn't come here to return the blankets you stole. I saw it on your face the moment they touched the table. You had forgotten all about them. What was

it you wanted? I can see you have a nice watch here. How much do you want? I can give you two hundred for it."

"That's very unfortunate for both of us. I can't part with the watch for a

thousand. We have a great secret between us ... I mean between me and the watch." Without looking up, I emptied the remaining contents from the bag onto the table. I said as I did so, "None of these clothes cost me under three hundred shillings and that was sometime back. I am in a jam and that is why I have the heart to part with any of them, select a few." Maish, as I said, bought anything that he thought could make an extra shilling. I was sure that from looking at the clothes he would not doubt they were expensive and some were almost new. He was my size but unlike me he was a mean person. He could not buy himself such clothes from a shop so getting them this way wasn't a bad idea. Luckily for me, Maish didn't have a flair for clothes. He selected two long trousers, two shirts and a sweater. None of them was among my best. From a shop, especially now that it was years after I had bought them, the clothes he selected would cost him over one thousand five hundred shillings. He was willing to part with two hundred shillings only.

"Look here, Maish," I protested. "These clothes are not stolen. I am selling them because I am under pressure. How can you give me fifty shillings for a corduroy which cost me about five hundred shillings. These shirts you are offering me twenty five shillings each, right now cost three hundred shillings each at Sir Henry's. You can't deal with me."

"But," he interrupted. "You must know that I do not want any more clothes. I have got enough as it stands and you can bet I cannot buy them for sale. You'll either take that or you don't. But one thing is certain, Chief. I am not adding a penny more."

I was beaten and I knew it. There was no point for further argument. I said, "Okay, today it is me, tomorrow you. Make no

mistake about this, Maish. If I ever get you in a position where I am the overdog, you'll really regret this day." He wasn't interested in whatever I was saying, which annoyed me all the more. He was then at his wallet counting two hundred shillings for me. An idea struck me, as he extended his left hand to give me my due. The right hand was still holding the wallet which had some hundreds showing. I tried to snatch

the wallet but missed it narrowly. I only managed to grab a one hundred shillings note. I held it together with the two hundred shillings I had taken.

"You can call the police you brute. It will be three hundred shillings or seven years in prison for you and two for me."

He tried to go for more clothes from the table which I moved to my side. He left his side of the table to come closer. I dropped the clothes on the floor, put the money in my breast pocket and said, "It is okay with me if that's what you prefer. We can have a showdown before anything else. And while you are at it, my friend, let's not forget that your bouncers are off duty."

He realized I wasn't joking and held himself back, then said, "Get out of my office you cheap hoodlum." I knew he was beaten and had given in. I put the remaining clothes without any hurry back into the leather bag. I zipped it, picked it up and, hanging it on my shoulder as usual, turned to get out of his office. At the door I heard, "For your information, Chief..." I turned to look at him and knew what he was about to tell me.

"Let it be," I banged the door behind me. I wasn't interested in whatever he would say. Who cared? I had gone to sell and I had sold, more than I expected. To hell with Maish. His lodging was not the only 'Harambee Lodging' I knew.

The encounter with Maish hadn't taken thirty minutes, so it was still early in the morning. As I passed by the open air cafe, customers this time were even more but I didn't stop. I was moving like a man in a hurry, yet I didn't have the vaguest idea where I was hurrying to. Three hundred shillings after such

poverty was very 'big 1110116/ for me and it excited me. I crossed River Road again, this time to get to Latema Road. I wanted to hang around Modem Green where you found people the twenty-four hours of the day.

As I went ahead, I heard, "Hey! Mwananchi simama." I turned to face the dark alley from where I was called. The first thing I saw was a police dog, then two cops one holding the dog by the chain and the other holding a gun, an AK47 rifle, though not pointing it at me. I stopped and at the same time my body started shivering. "Where are you off to in such a hurry? What is in this bag? Is it yours, really?" One of them took it off my shoulders and unzipped it. The dog, which I feared most, looked at me licking its mouth then at the bag. "Why are you shaking, Mwananchi? Can we see your ID card?"

"I am afraid I do not have one."

"Which means you are not a citizen? Then no doubt you have a passport. Can we have a look at it?"

"I am a Kenyan, I swear, I am not a foreigner. I can prove ..."

"Then produce your ID card. That's the only proof. And let me warn you gentleman, do not say it got lost because that will make matters worse for you." He had taken the words out of my mouth. That was the truth and it was what I wanted to say. But I took this warning seriously. After all I knew what they were after. They were going back to their station after a night on duty and I knew when they weren't lucky to make good money during the night they were likely to be very ruthless in the morning. To get myself out of their grip, I had to tip them generously and I wasn't ready to part with the little I had earned by selling my clothes. Like me, they were in for a bad time. "The ID card please, Mwananchi." the cop repeated arrogantly.

"But I told you I do not have one." I was vexed, especially when I looked at my clothes sprawled on the ground.

"I told you I do not have . . ." he mimicked. "Then put these

clothes back into your bag and head for the police station. You'll tell that to the judge." I bent down to start doing it when the dog leaped at me roaring like a lion and missing me narrowly. The cop held it pulling it closer to himself and I continued. I neither talked as I did so nor did

I take interest when the other one said, Talk good language with us, Mwananchi. We are people like you.*

"If you know that why harass me?" I asked. When I had finished, I put the bag back on the shoulder and started off towards Central Police Station.

"What do you think you are doing?"

"I thought you said we are going to the Police Station from here."

"Toboka kitu, Mwananchi. Ukifika kule utapata hasara. Nunua chai."

"I have no money. Mimimwenyewesijakunyua chai." I wished they understood my condition and the problems I had. I had just sold my clothes so that I could be in a position to avoid the police and their clean up and the first place I land after so doing was in their hands. What a pity?

We reached Tom Mboya Street. I was about three metres ahead of the Police officers. From Hallians night Club there emerged two men and a young girl behind them. The police stopped them. They were ordered to join me on my way to the station. They too didn't have their ID cards. Most people don't carry them. At the nation House, one gentleman remained a step behind to wait for the officers who were some distance behind. As he talked to them, we were ordered to stop. After about three minutes I saw the man produce something from his pocket and give it to one of the officers. The one with the rifle. There seemed to be some kind of a bargain then the man was released. We did not have to be told that he had bought his freedom. Like me, the girl and the other man did not have any

spare money. In fifteen minutes, we reached Central Police Station and we were duly locked up.

We were taken to court on the second day. There were thirty other people who were going together with me to Makadara Court. I had by then known that I was being charged with being drunk and disorderly.

A funny charge that was. Why did people have to give others such ill treatment? I wondered. It was almost ten years since I had last tasted beer. The truth was I didn't even know the cost of a bottle of beer as it was long since I got into a bar. I wouldn't drink changaa, chibuku. nyukior muratina even if someone offered it to me free of charge. If I couldn't afford to drink beer, I couldn't afford to take alcohol of any other kind. But how was the judge to know all this? On the way I was made to understand that if I pleaded not guilty my case would be given an allocation probably a month from then, during which time I would be remanded in custody. It was a devil's alternative. I was either to pay a fine of a hundred shillings or go to prison for a month. I opted for the former.

"Wamathina," someone called softly. It was the young looking girl seated on my left. Before anything else, I was taken by surprise that in this hooded vehicle there was someone who knew me. Then I got it. There was a roll-call before we were ushered into this black maria and while we were being given our money from the OB. I turned and faced her, wondering as I did so, why she had to pick on me. "You must help me please. I am

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"Mow look here, young girl," I interrupted not wishing her to put her trust in me. It was the wrong time and place for such. "We all need plenty of help right now. I think I am in a worse position than you are, only that ..."

"But you have the money. You are very okay," she too interrupted. "We will be fined and ..."

"So what do you want? Me to pay the fine for you?" We were

all talking in low tones as if afraid of those besides us. But the reasons were quite clear. She didn't want a third party to know that she was desperate just as I did not want them to know I was not willing to help because the money I had was my entire treasure on this earth.

By the time we arrived at Makadara, I had made up my mind. The young girl had won and I was going to help her. I thought it was better this way, to help a needy person than to feed a corrupt police officer. We were ushered into the courtroom and one hour later we had started getting into the dock. My time came. "S.O.F. Wamathina, you are hereby accused that on 12th of February 1987, you were found drunk and disorderly along Latema Road within Nairobi town. Are you guilty or not guilty?" I decided to tell the lie of the year to this Government representative in a law court. It wasn't my fault I was being forced to lie by yet another Government representative of law. "Quilty, your Honour," I said.

Tou'll pay one hundred shillings fine or go to prison for one month."

"I'll pay the fine, your Honour." And that was it. After one hour, I was free again. Fifteen minutes later I freed Rose Kahungura.

"We must go to my home, Wamathina. I'll never forget what you have done for me. You are the most generous person I have met in my life." I could see she was serious. She was genuinely happy and wanted me to go with her to her home. I didn't have anything better to do nor did I have anywhere else in mind where I could go. So I whole-heartedly accepted the offer. But, of course, I had to appear reluctant to preserve my dignity.

We boarded a bus for town and then from town took route number nine. Two shillings got us to Eastleigh where I thought this smartly dressed young lady lived. But we continued on foot after alighting, going towards Mathare Valley. I followed

Kahungura in and out of dark alleys between shanties. At last we came to one. She Knocked but there was no answer so she pushed the door inside. I noticed some uneasiness in her but could not guess what caused it. Was there a man? Was this girl I had followed all the way from town married? Was she afraid of what would happen to her as a result of being away for two days and when she turns up she brings a man along with her? I looked at the two loaves of bread I was carrying. She had requested me to buy some, a kilogram of sugar, tea leaves,

and two packets of milk. Could she have asked me to buy these if she had a husband and made me carry them as if I was the husband. Before I could get answers to my own questions, she invited me in. I bent a bit to get through the door and entered.

The welcome I got was the sad cry of children . I saw three children stand up almost simultaneously. Their eyes were swollen, an indication that they had spent hours crying. I looked at Kahungura. I could hardly believe I wasn't dreaming. It seemed as if she thought I was accusing her of something; accusing her of leaving children helpless and getting herself nabbed by the police. As an answer she told me /This is why I needed your help so badly. Imagine they have gone for two days and nights without food." My eyes went back to the children. What a life! While the mother prepared to light a stove, I took the packets of milk and opened them.

The first born who was about five years old brought me three cups at my request. I poured all the milk into the three cups. By then the children had come to me. I took the youngest into my arms and sat with him on the bed. I told the oldest, a girl to take some bread and divide it between the two of them while I continued feeding the youngest. "Don't give them all the milk, we are going to make some tea." The mother called.

"You'll either go for more or forget about the tea," I retorted, then took some ten shillings from my pocket and gave to her.

After putting water on the stove, she opened the door and went out. I continued feeding my boy. I would dip a piece of bread into the milk and put it in his mouth which he would swallow without chewing. Realizing this, I took care to give him the soft part of the bread. The kids were really dying of hunger. When I looked up, the other two had cleared the second loaf and were staring at me. How long this had taken place, I couldn't tell. I cut more pieces for them which they continued eating dry since they had drained all the milk. When the two year old was dealing with the third portion of the bread, I took out my tongue to tease him and he responded with a wide smile. That relieved me. I gave the half-cast the remaining piece of bread and put him

down. He raised some resistance which no doubt meant he wanted to stay where he was, in my arms. The mother entered and he stood up throwing the remaining small piece away.

"Chiru," the mother called the girl, "you can go out to play now. I'll call you when tea is ready." Chiru took the youngest child, put him on her back and followed by the second boy, they went out. From the way they reacted, it was obvious that they had gotten used to being sent out of the room. That was the life for these women.

When they had gone out, I took out my shoes and lay on the bed. I hadn't slept for about thirty hours and I felt so tired. I wasn't used to breakfast nor ten o'clock tea or even lunch so I wasn't bothered. But the fact that I had spent so much within one day made me feel hungry. Within fifteen minutes, tea was ready. Kahungura shook me just as I was about to doze off and I sat up. She had bought another loaf of bread. She sliced it expertly and brought some to me. She pushed a small table in the small room near the bed, put the breakfast-cum-lunch on it and sat beside me. Like the sinner she was, and which surprised me, she closed her eyes and prayed. If she wasn't pretending then, women are the funniest animals living. By the time she

opened her eyes, I was on my second toast. Like me, she was surprised that I wasn't closing my eyes though we did not talk about it. We took our meal in total silence. I wished the children were around; the silence was more hurting than the children's noise. Some kind of immoral silence. After that, I told her I wanted to have a nap. I also reminded her to call the children and give them some tea and the remaining bread. From the way she looked at me, I could see she had made the mistake of thinking I would make a good husband. It was already too late for that.

She shook me again and I opened my eyes. I looked at my watch and saw that it was 4.30 pm. I had slept for over four hours. I took a cigarette and lit it. Then I asked, "What's it? Are you sending me away now?"

"Christ," she cried out, putting her right hand on her chest. "What an

accusation! This house is all yours for as long as you want, forever if you want it that way." At least that was encouraging. Although I was sure I couldn't stay here long, I had the assurance that I was most welcome. 'I have a roof over my head at least for today,' I told myself. Tomorrow meant very little as far as this way of living was concerned. "What's it then?" I enquired after some silence.

"I wanted you to take me to the market, please, if you don't mind." I didn't mind of course, but the idea of a supermarket made me think Kahungura was going a bit too far. Did she have money or was she going to make me pay with the little that had remained? Did she think I still had enough money for a supermarket's shopping? I jumped out of the bed and put on my shoes. Killing myself with questions wasn't going to solve the problem. If anything, I was to gather enough courage and let her know I wasn't such a tycoon who didn't care about the consequences. But I never gathered the courage, so I waited and followed instructions as they came. The bag she took for

shopping would look out of place in any of the supermarkets I knew of, but I did not tell her so. Some instinct told me that she had more experience in this kind of life than I had so I decided to follow her way of doing things.

I followed Kahungura out of the shanty to the road. Here we didn't stop . We followed the road to the East the opposite direction to the city centre. We walked alongside the main road for sometime. At times she would get the courage of going for my hand so that we would walk hand in hand. I would withdraw my hand pretending to have some urgent need for my hand. After some forty-five good minutes, we came to an open-air market. It was completely the opposite of what I had in mind. The name of the market was 'Soko Mjinga', which translates to Foolish Market. Whatever was sold in this market was so cheap such that with fifteen shillings you could buy food for Vwe days.

We bought sweet and Irish potatoes, yams, green vegetables, green maize and beans, rice and flour. All were sold as if they were duty free. The only thing I hated on arrival was the dirt you encountered as you moved from stand to stand. We filled the bag she was carrying and

another one which was inside it, spending only thirty shillings which she paid. Then we went back home. This took one hour. On arrival at home, Kahungura went straight to preparing supper. The meal was better than I had had for years and I enjoyed it greatly. After we had eaten, she fetched water in a basin and went out to the public bath. When she finished, she changed into clean clothes.

Up to now, I did not know what would follow after supper. I had before then requested the girl to clean the small child who looked like he had been bathing in mud. His mother had taken out good clothes from her box and dressed the boy. She had detected my interest in the child. I then took the child and started playing with him wondering as I did what was to come next. As I lit a cigarette, Kahungura came and sat beside me. She

put her hand on my thigh and said, "Wamathina, I hope you don't mind."

I couldn't understand so I asked, "Mind what?" Then just before she answered me, I got it. She had cleaned herself, powdered herself, to go out as usual.

"I am going out," she answered. I wished she would understand how much I wanted her to go. Her departure was an answer to my question as to how we would sleep. Even without her, I still didn't know how we would share the room with the children. There wasn't any other bed in the room or anything I could guess the children would use for a bed. It was obvious that they never used the bed. It was too clean for them.

"Feel very free. I have no objection whatsoever and I certainly do not mind." Whether I gave my consent for her to go or not I did not know, but she looked relieved which pleased me.

"Oh, you are a great man. Chiru will arrange the other bed. She knows what to do. Can you escort me to the road?"

"I am afraid not," I said with a forced smile. She slapped me on the face lightly, snatched my hand, shook it and left.

"Qood night and good luck," she called.

"You are the one who needs both those things, not me. Do not take two nights off." She understood the joke, waved and left smiling.

We talked with the children until late. When I looked at my watch, I saw it was past midnight. The children had liked me as I had liked them. As a result we passed time very easily. I called Chiru. "Chiru, prepare your bed. It is very late. Tom will sleep with me on the bed. Does he pee at night on the bed?"

"Mo," she answered as she stood and headed for a box under their mother's bed. Inside it, she took out a mat, like carpet. She took out three blankets and folding two of them, she made a thin mattress which she spread on the carpet. "The bed is ready." She invited her brother to join her under their mother's bed.

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Although I found this some kind of an interesting life, I did not forget to remind myself that it was far much better than 'missing line' or worse, prison.

I heard a knock at the door and I woke up. I glanced at my watch which was still on my wrist and saw it was getting to 6.30 am. 'Still very early', I thought. I was just about to get up when I heard Chiru on the door, working up the bolt. I admired her for her alertness. Tom was still on my chest where he had lain the previous night. He had slept there, meaning that none of us had even turned. When the mother entered, she came straight to the bed. She bent down to reach for the young boy who had stirred and had opened his eyes when the door was opened. Her breath as she talked and kissed her son hit my nostrils almost upsetting my stomach. It was obvious that she had spent most of the night drinking beer. If she had had any sleep, you could tell from her red sleepy eyes that, it did not exceed three hours. She greeted me as she picked her son. Her breath was so terrible to me given that I hadn't taken beer in a long time, that I answered and turned to face the wall.

I stepped out of the bed one hour later. Breakfast was ready. Kahungura had sent Chiru for water while she fetched a ten shilling note from my jacket and went for milk and bread. There was no doubt I was paying for every minute I stayed in this shanty. I asked Chiru to provide me with some water in a basin. Now that I was living like a semi-human being, I thought it was advisable to behave like one. So for the first time in several months, I took a bath.

Life was like that. I stayed in this shanty until the kids decided I was the right person to be given the title 'daddy'. A sugar daddy? Who were sugar daddies? They didn't exist when I went to jail. I found it funny anyway. Odd too. How could we have produced a half cast when we were both black? Anyone would wonder. But that was not the immediate worry. What one

thought didn't worry me. The truth was that Kahungura wasn't my wife. What worried me was how long I was going to play this husband role which demanded money every day. By some kind of fluke, I had managed to push them for about three weeks although every minute I produced ten shillings in the morning the whole of my backbone ached. That was too expensive a breakfast. One should not forget that I was earning it through selling my personal clothes. Once I had met Capone and he had flashed a hundred bob to me. Somehow he had come across some tangible money and was doing very well. But with criminals, money is like air inhaled which comes out immediately. The next time I saw Capone, he hadn't taken a meal for twenty four hours and was selling a pair of shoes to a street cobbler who was not willing to give him a hundred shillings for shoes that had cost five hundred and ninety-nine shillings. Again that day he had given me a pound and I had gone back home to the shanty with a kilogramme of sugar, coffee and some matumbo. Capone was a great friend.

The idea of taking off got into me when by coincidence we happened to be home together, Kahungura and I. Normally, we never met during the day. In most cases I would go to town before she arrived from her 'night duties'. By the time I got home she'd be gone for her night shift. A lady knocked at the door and came in without even waiting for an

answer. The children were having their lunch, the last born being fed by the mother while I lay on the bed, afraid to go out to meet the world which I now regarded as cruel. I was to know later that she was the landlady.

"Today is fifth," she started barking before even greeting us. "I have always told you that I do not like getting into your rooms demanding for money. Can you tell me why you haven't paid the house rent? You have a husband now and you cannot give me excuses. Kwani hii ni ngoima ya kirike uiweka kwa nyumba uinoneshe?" I have never heard such dirty language. To make

the matter worse, Kahungura turned to me to ask when I'd provide the house rent, as if what I was doing wasn't enough for a man from the street. The woman couldn't wait to be given an answer. She continued throwing bitter words and every now and then referring to me as if I rented the shanty. I resisted an urge to beat her up until my whole body started shaking.

"What should I tell her?" Kahungura asked me. Since it was a Wednesday, I decided to give myself two days in which I'd prepare to take off.

I said, "I am expecting money on Friday. Could she try then? In the evening hours, that is." She was told so which made her get almost mad. But there was nothing else she could do. She spat more venom and left. The children looked at me, probably wondering what difference there was between me and their mother if I could stomach such words. I had never felt so embarrassed in life.

"Please," Kahungura started nagging me, "make sure you have the money ready by then. That woman is a beast. She's crazy about money. Imagine rent of a hundred and fifty shillings for this shanty. We'll have to find a better place Wamathina." That made me decide. A hundred and fifty shillings would mean selling all the clothes I was remaining with which of course I wasn't going to do right now. Then she was naive enough to suggest that 'we' find a better place. Where the rent was double that, and there was electricity and water. . . a self contained

'better place'. I thought she must be crazy.

When I left the shanty on Friday, I had forty-five shillings on me. I intended to leave on Thursday but the children had realized and had started crying. Chiru for instance could not easily be deceived. She was too bright for her age. Tommy had insisted that he'd go with me if I was to go. Ignorantly, he believed I was his father. So on Friday, I got a break when Kahungura didn't show up. It was the first day since I joined her

and her children in this shanty, for her to fail to turn up in the morning. It was obvious the police had caught her again. I hated the thought that she'd be held for two or more days but I had to go. I called Chiru and gave her five shillings instructing her to go for bread and to take the other children along with her so that she could buy sweets for them. By the time they got back, if they did, I was gone. Like Lot of Sodom, I did not turn back.

I moved along the road without knowing exactly where I was heading to. All I knew was that I was moving away from trouble following Juja Road towards the city centre. I found myself standing at the country bus stop on Wgara Road. I still had my bag with me. It had become part of me, but this time it had very few clothes. I had sold most of them. A bus came to a halt at the stop. It indicated that it was travelling to Meru, through Muranga and Embu. 'Trida Success', I read. 'Who is Frida? The owner's wife, sister or daughter? Or was it just a name? What was the success the owner was secretly referring to? What had he succeeded in doing? Stealing some big cash and getting away with it?' It was difficult for me to believe that a man could become so rich without a criminal act behind the riches or did fate favour some people while it made sure others tasted trouble in its actual form? 'Trida Success' took off when the driver spotted 'Qathanga Success' behind. 'The same successful secret,' I thought. 'If I ever get rich and buy myself a bus, I'll name it 'Mathina ma Arume' - men's problems. Day dreaming; castles in the air,' I thought with a smile. Stupid as the thought was, it pleased me.

An urge to move away hit me as I stood there. An urge to go as far

away as possible from this city. 'Wamathina, just enter the bus and go. What is so good in this city that you'll regret leaving behind? The ML? The cockroaches and bed bugs in Mathare shanties? Why don't you try your luck somewhere else, in another town? Become a big fish in a small pond?' I resisted whoever was giving me such advice. Nairobi was the only place

I knew well. If I was to go to another town I needed some bigger money but not the forty shillings I had. Then 'Mwangaza' came onto the scene. I thought the name made a lot of sense. It would mean so much with so little. The bus came to a stop. 'Had this bus brought 'light' to people where it belonged? Had the owner personally got light? Mad he somehow learnt the secret of success and decided to buy a bus and name the secret Mwangaza? Had he... ?' I was still on it when I realized my bag had been snatched from my shoulder and the tout who had done it insisted the bus would stop wherever I was going provided it was along Thika-Murang'a Road. Like a fool, I followed the tout to where I was shown a seat. Next to me was a lady who was busy reading a Drum magazine. She was laughing at how Dolly had answered questions to those who were still looking for their lost love. 'Love,' I thought, 'another complicated thing. Did it really ever exist. Did it perish during Noah's time, when Qod regretted having ever created man?' The lady laughed again. This time I peeped to see what was so funny. 'My penis is too short and all my girlfriends . . .'

'What a stupid thing to find fun out of,' I told myself. The conductor reached me and extended his hand. I got out a pound and said, "Maragwa". He gave me ten shillings back. I had decided to visit my grandmother.

Chapter Two

A glance at my watch told me it was 1.25 pm. We had arrived in Maragwa. 'Bye Mwangaza and whatever you stand for.' I headed straight for where matatus to Mugoiri were parked. It was over a decade since I had visited my grandmother last. I didn't know whether the matatus had moved to a new location so I wanted to be certain before making a move. One matatu left just as I arrived and the second

on the queue took the stand. I hurried to take a seat next to the driver as I did not want to travel in the body. I wanted to make sure I wasn't going to the wrong direction. Thirty minutes later our vehicle left.

I paid ten shillings to Qithagara. On arriving I alighted. Years ago, my grandfather had owned the only hotel in this shopping centre. It stopped functioning as soon as he died. I walked towards the shops. I had fifteen shillings remaining. I decided to buy something for my grandmother, that is if she was still alive. I bought a kilogram of sugar, a packet of tea leaves, some loaves of bread and some cigarettes. I went completely broke. If my grandmother wasn't there, then I was sunk. I put the items in my bag without any hurry. I hadn't bothered to introduce myself to Mjeri, the shopkeeper. She'd have remembered me but right now I felt inferior. Who would I say I was? After all who would care knowing a person who looked like he would get crazy anytime of the day? I put my bag on my shoulder and left. It would take me only five minutes to get to my grandmother's residence if I still remembered.

A string of blue smoke going upwards in a straight thin line attracted my eyes. It was just next to a Mugumo tree which was on the way to my grandmother's hut. The smoke reminded me of things I saw years back when I was a kid. Under the Mugumo

tree was where my grandfather and other wazee' used to sacrifice a lamb without a blemish to 'Mwene Myaga' especially when they wanted rain. When the smoke went up the way it did as I watched it now, they knew Mwene Nyaga had heard the prayers. I remembered it used to rain before they even reached their homes. But that was over twenty five years back. Those who used to sacrifice under the Mugumo tree were long dead. The last survivor of the group was my grandpa and he had died over ten years ago. Who would be reviving those buried memories? Or was it just a coincidence? I reached the Mugumo tree and I saw a fire. Someone had lit a fire on the same spot the wazee used to. There was one huge log which kept the fire burning. This was an interesting thing and would have been a good story when I was a journalist. Now it didn't matter. Why should I bother myself with

something which I wasn't going to do anything about? I continued climbing the hill towards my grandmother's hut which was now in sight.

My grandfather had insisted on living in a grass thatched round hut. He was a traditionalist and even the hut was built according to our fore-fathers' tradition. There were only a few things here and there which were modern, like the door and the partitioning of the rooms. Grandfather could have afforded a better house but he believed in traditions so much. So, my grandmother inherited what grandfather left behind and, like him she believed there was no point of becoming too modern. There were stone stairs you had to ascend to come to the hut which I climbed, while counting them. I was now sure my grandmother was in because some smoke was finding its way out of the hut. 'Three, four, five, six, seven', I continued counting the stairs. As I reached the top, I saw a figure emerge from behind an open door. "Grandmother! Oh, mother of my mother, I am overjoyed to see you again." I went straight to her and she took me into both her arms after dropping her walking

stick down. "Son, Mwene Tiyaga has answered my prayers! I had to call you to bury me."

"Grandma, what are you talking about? I do not understand a word."

"Just come in, my dear, there is so much you do not know," she led me in.

I realized you had to go in sideways so as to enter the hut. I stretched my hand to open the door wider for my grandmother. I gave it a push and realized it could not move an inch. "Don't bother, son, it is all over now," grandmother told me. But I could not understand what she meant. Why was she talking like Jesus? Everything was in parables. What was all over? I tried the door again ignoring her but it was a waste of effort. I realized that the hut was slanting, inclining to one side and that the door had become the hut's strongest post. Without it, the hut would no doubt fall. This meant that grandmother would neither open the door wider nor close it, so it remained ajar day and

night. 'When human beings become so old, they cease to take great care of themselves,' I thought as grandmother led me right into the kitchen. She was still muttering things I couldn't understand and did not bother to ask about. There was no point since all grandmothers have that tendency. I was given a 'njungwa - stool' to sit on beside the fire. I put my bag down and sat, pulling the njungwa a little further from the fire. I wasn't used to warming myself and I did not want to start now, especially during the daytime.

I looked at my grandmother properly. 'Christ,' I called inwardly, 'did our father in heaven find it fair this way? That one day we shall all get physically deformed and look like beasts?' My grandmother's face had so many wrinkles that what remained of her actual face could not be traced. I watched her sit down with much difficulty. What pleased me was the fact that grandmother was so happy that I had arrived. She called, "Son,

it is all over, I had to call you." I listened without interrupting hoping that as she continued talking I would grasp at least something small and make sense out of it. Moreover as a journalist I had been taught to use my ears and eyes twice as much as I used my mouth. This had saved me in so many instances, "I can see you do not understand. Did you pass near that Mugumo tree?"

"Yes, someone has lit a fire there. It looks like ..."

"Mo son, don't speculate. I lit the fire to call you and you are here already. That means Mwene Nyaga is still with me. When that fire you saw goes off, it will go with me. I called you to bury me."

"But grandmother those are what we call superstitions, they are beliefs which ..."

Tou, a son of the gods dare doubt them? You the Son of Fate, of all people? You call the gods' answers to my prayers superstitions? Did you bring yourself here or would you have thought about me? This pen and paper brought by what Mugo wa Kiburu termed as white butterflies from the west spoiled you. You do not know where you

belong. Son, listen to me and do exactly as I want or when I am gone, I'll come back to haunt you. I called you because you are my only hope. You are the light of our wretched family. Son, do all I tell you when I am gone and you will never regret it." She got up and without using her walking stick this time, she went to an old black box. Somehow she appeared to have gained some strength which she did not have before. As she opened the box she asked me, "Before I forget, son, tell me about my poor daughter. I do not blame her for not seeing me. She cannot afford anything anymore. She lost her husband at a very early stage. My unfortunate daughter, how is she?" Hell, I was going to be forced to lie. How bad it was to tell a lie to an old woman who sounded convinced that her death was at hand. But I saw no point in keeping her worried so I decided a single lie wouldn't hurt.

"She is okay, grandmother. At least she is doing well physically." To change the subject I asked, "Grandmother, do you know I wasn't around for sometime? This is why I took so long . . ."

"I know, son, I know. Son of Fate, I wish you'd see how clearly your star is shining especially in the near future." I watched her coming back. I now became convinced that she was crazy. My star shining in the near future? I wished she'd know the troubles I had had in my life and I wasn't yet a third of her own age. "So my daughter is doing well? When did you see her last?" Christ, that subject again. What was I going to say? 'Keep on telling an old woman lies? No! I'll just keep quiet', I told myself and refused to talk of my mother who I hadn't seen for over ten years. She came and sat down on her njungwa. then she put a quiver she had fetched from the box between her legs, and she faced me squarely. "How dare you tell me a lie? You haven't gone to see your own mother for so many years. This is why you do not want to talk about it." She continued talking, accusing me of several things as she opened the lid of the quiver and started pouring some contents out of it. I opened my eyes wider for I could not believe what I thought I was seeing. But I didn't have to for I was seeing the right thing. It was money, in small bundles.

'Well,' I thought in surprise, 'if she's intending to give me all this, then

my star will surely shine.' I realized I too had developed lust for money.

"Here, son," she called, "come, take all this and count. Mot for me, for yourself. I have kept the money for years for you. There are also other documents your grandfather had said were important. Read them too so you can know what to do with them. They are all yours." With shaking hands and in disbelief I went closer and pulled the small bundles of money nearer to me. Some instinct was telling me there was something wrong. I untied the bundle on top, then I saw the flaw. The bundle in my

hand told me I was holding worthless money. 'East African Currency Board', I read. 'The board which was replaced by the Central Bank of Kenya over twenty five years ago,' I thought, without letting her see my disappointment. I picked up another bundle. It was the same. I forgot the loss for a minute to look at the image of Queen Elizabeth.

Tou count like a machine, son. Education is not bad. It becomes bad only when it tells you that gods don't exist; that there's no witchcraft and that you should not pray and sacrifice to Mwene riyaga under the Mugumo tree. Continue counting."

The eighth bundle was different. This was Kenyan currency alright but of the past regime. The stipulated date for exchanging the money with the new currency was three years back. The image was of the first president of the Republic of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta. 'What a waste,' I thought, and started pitying my grandmother. I decided not to let her know that the money had been buried a bit too long and that it was as worthless now as cowrie shells. I thought she would get a terrible shock and probably collapse.

"Son, your face tells me there is something wrong with the money." She had read my face. I was ignorantly giving away my disappointment. "What is wrong, son?" I thought quickly. I had to convince her somehow that it had nothing to do with the money.

"I was just picturing this first president lying in a grave after all his

struggles."

"Oh, yes, he died very young. I knew him as a young boy. But it is good, son, to go and rest." It was funny that my grandmother would say a man who died at the age of almost ninety died young. With the problems I had encountered I could not bring myself to think that I'd see fifty.

Then I came to the current money. A glance at me convinced my grandmother that everything was okay. I counted slowly, the

greed I had shown earlier on completely gone. Two thousand, nine hundred and seventy. I sighed with relief. Even with something close to three thousand, my star would shine, I told myself. I collected all that money from the floor and unzipped an inner pocket in my bag and put the money there. I put the new currency in my jackets' pocket dividing them so that if it came to losing it I would not lose all. It was while I was doing all this that I saw the things I had bought for my grandmother. I took them out.

"Grandma, you made me forget I had brought some bread for you. Oh I am sorry." The way she welcomed my presents told me that I had done the most thoughtful thing. She said she now knew I cared for her as much as she cared for me.

"How good that the last bread I'll eat on this earth comes from you. You cannot imagine how happy I'll die, son. Can you make tea?"

"Yes, grandma, I can."

"Please make some, I feel so tired." I had by now seen the other documents. Some were licenses for a shop and a hotel, a title deed for eight acres of land on which my grandma was staying, another title for two plots in the shopping centre. She had asked whether they were important and I had explained everything to her.

"Use them, they are all yours. Everything I leave behind is all yours." What was all this? Why was she so sure about her death in the near

future? I didn't like any bit of it.

I served her with a cup of tea and a piece of bread which I cut with my hands. I poured some for myself. We got busy, each lost in our different worlds. Could it be that grandma had somehow managed to call me? May be by telepathy? I had started getting convinced. All this time, grandma was staring at me. It seemed like she was able to read my mind which made me afraid. "Son," she called, "get up and bring that bag hanging there." I did so. It was an old small leather bag. It was home

made, the leather being the skin of an antelope which still had fur all over.

From inside the bag she took out a small object about one inch long. It was curved such that it was semi-circular. Like the bag from which it was fetched, the object was covered by fur. On close observation, you noticed some spots like those of a leopard. It had a sling made of skin, cut very thin from the same animal skin. She gave the thing to me and I observed it with much interest. It didn't make any sense but it was admirable. Then I heard grandmother say, "Keep that thing for as long as you live. That will determine your future so protect it with your life. Son, do not lose it for it will bring back your love which I am sure is now lost."

"Tiyanya. hirizi niyanini unanipea?" I laughed realizing what it was meant to be. It was a talisman. What would I do with a talisman of all things? I wondered. Grandmother realized how lightly I had taken the talisman. It was obvious even from my reactions that I was going to throw it away any minute from then. She took it from my hands and put it around my neck.

"Son, you are a good fool. Do you realize that this is the greatest present I am leaving for you? Just one minute," she said, and went back to her box which looked more of a beehive than a box. She fetched out a twisted string made of sisal which had changed colour with age. "Son," she called, "do you want to know for how long I have kept that thing? Here," she said, giving me the string, "count those

knots. It was given to me by your great grandfather the day I married your grandfather." I smiled as I took the long string. What a way to keep a record of years. My smile faded and was replaced by surprise when I counted a hundred knots and still there were more.

I stopped to ask, "Grandmother, are you sure you are not making a mistake? Did you say the day you married grandpapa?"

"Son, I might be old but not stupid. I said when I married your grandfather."

"And when do you put a knot . . . how many times a year?"

"Every third day of the second week of the third month of each year." she answered. I wished I would understand the parable because I didn't. But one thing was certain; she knew what one year was. Each knot represented a year. I continued counting, honestly not believing it. A hundred and thirteen. I realized I was sweating, not because of the work done but because of the thought that grandmother must have been an adult when she married my grandfather.

I called, "Grandmother, do you realize that you are ..."

"Don't tell me," she interrupted. "It is your duty to carry the talisman that long. Leave it to your favourite grandson, the son who will bury you." I gave up arguing seeing how serious she was about the issue. 'The son who will bury you,' I thought. 'Who could tell that I wasn't going to die even before I got married, superstitious old grandmother?' I wished she knew how badly fate was treating me.

A cow mooed outside the hut and drew grandmother's attention. She took her walking stick and standing up she told me, "Come and meet Kareithi. He's my herdsboy. A very good boy. You must take care of him, son, when I am gone. The boy is a bastard."

She led me out. But why had she to keep on talking of when she's gone? The talk was getting engraved on my mind which I detested.

The boy was about fifteen years old. Me was as poorly dressed as my grandmother though that seemed not to worry either of them. I sensed he was feeling inferior before me not knowing that I wasn't any better. I went to him and shook hands with him. As I had thought, he gained some morale and even managed a smile. I introduced myself and then for the sake of it I asked. "How was the grazing?"

Then grandmother took over the introductions. Kareithi was my grandmother's cook as well. By the time the sun was setting, he had prepared ugali which was taken with condensed milk. That night I was shown where to sleep. It wasn't a comfortable place but I was used to worse places. On the other hand, I knew I had so much to think about over the night and where I slept wasn't important. I had about three thousand shillings which I had to plan for. 'If planned well/1 thought 'I'd make a fortune.' I detested the days and times when I wasted tens of thousands of shillings without a care in the world.

I was awakened by my grandmother at around 8.30 am. I had stayed awake almost the whole night and I did not sleep until around dawn. Breakfast was ready and since in this kind of life you don't bother washing your face, I went straight away to take breakfast which was served by my grandmother.

"Son, when you are through with breakfast come outside. You'll take me for a walk.'

We left for the 'walk' one hour later. At a snail's speed my grandmother led me around the eight acres of land. I realized what she had in mind when we came to a point where she stopped. Pointing with her walking stick, she showed me the demarcation of the land which once belonged to my grandfather. There were trees marking every point so it was easy to follow. When we got to the top, which took us not less than two hours, she called me again, "Son, come I show you the last phase."

I followed her for a short distance to a bushy place. Here she stopped. She stared at me as if she was surprised to see me still alive. The stare made my blood pressure rise. She said, "Observe this place carefully." I

did so, but there was nothing special about the place. "This is my grave. When I die bury me here." She collected some pieces of sticks, and with them marked four comers which formed a rectangle. It wasn't very accurate but that didn't matter. "Don't give up digging until you meet my

partner. When you do, lay me beside him.* That made me shiver. Could she be meaning beside the skeleton of my grandfather? There was no sign of a grave to confirm my suspicion. Without warning she sped towards the hut, leaving me confused where I stood. The woman was surely certain about her death.

The mooing of the cow took me off my thought. It was still too early for it to be home. At least, I sensed there had to be something unusual. I stood up from where I was seated and went towards the cow's shed mostly to keep Kareithi company than to know what was wrong. I hadn't been here long enough to be sure that the cow being home at that hour was really unusual. About ten feet away, I realized the reason why-the cow had given birth.

Kareithi knew what to do whenever he needed my help. So he told me and I gave a hand. When he had finished attending to the cow and its calf, I asked him to accompany me to the shopping centre. I had various things in mind, the first one being buying some clothes for him and some blankets for myself. We passed near the Mugumo tree and got to the road. I glanced at my watch and saw it was 4.15 pm. When we were about twenty metres from the shopping centre, I felt my heart beat faster. Then something crossed my mind. When I turned to talk to Kareithi he asked, "What's wrong? Got some headache?"

"no," I answered in a hurry. "Tell me, when we passed near the Mugumo tree did you see the fire burning?"

"Mo, it was off," he answered but seemed surprised that I should get bothered by a thing like that.

"Why are you so sure it wasn't burning?" I had by then grabbed him, without realizing it and he was shaking as he answered.

"Even by the time I brought the cow home it was off. You are hurting me please." I became aware of it and apologized.

"Please follow me." I was by then running like I was out to save my life. Kareithi ran after me. I didn't give a damn to whoever was watching the drama. Who were they to me? I had to see my grandmother. I continued running, saying prayers that my grandmother be alive as I did so.

I reached the hut, went straight in calling loudly, but there was no answer. I found her lying on her boards which served as a bed normally, near the fire. I reached her and called, "Grandmother, are you alright? Please talk to me. "It was useless. When I shook her shoulder the whole body shook. She was dead.

I looked up and realized that all that time I was kneeling down beside my grandmother, Kareithi was standing behind me. His face told me that he didn't understand what was going on. If anything there was total confusion and unexplained surprise on his face. I got to my feet and telling no one in particular said, "She's gone, she's dead." This was when Kareithi understood. It was my time now to stare. Confused, Kareithi let out a scream that made me deaf temporarily. When I faced him, he had taken my place beside my grandmother and unlike me was calling her name madly and shaking her body wildly. I called him twice to stop him from the outburst but he couldn't hear. I decided to give him time so I left the room and went out to smoke while I thought.

I went down to the Mugumo tree for the sake of something to do. I was now on my second cigarette. I went nearer and bent to turn the log. There wasn't a single glitter of fire. I touched where the log had had fire and it was as cold as my grandmother. Could there have been some relevance between the two after all? I wondered. I sat on the log smoking and thinking. That was the end of the only human being on earth whom I loved, the only one who ever thought about me and now she was dead. She wasn't wrong after all. If there was anytime when I felt my love gone, vanished, dead, it was now. My mind started seeing ghosts

as I sat in this place which I now regarded as holy. I stood up and left. If grandmother hadn't forewarned me so regularly about her death, it would have caught me unawares and made me go crazy like Kareithi. I moved back to the hut which now I had inherited.

I didn't want to go back into the room right then. I had seen enough. I called Kareithi. I had given him enough time to mourn his grandma. He came out, still shedding tears. "Stop crying, son, * I called him the name son by reflex. "She knew she was dying and that is why she sent for me. After all, son, we shouldn't forget that grandmother was over one hundred and thirty years old. Should we really expect her to live forever? Think of a hundred and thirty five years, and you will know she died very peacefully." I could see he was making some sense from what I was telling him.

He composed himself and told me "Let's go and kneel beside her and pray."

"What for?" I asked. I was genuinely surprised.

"For her. That is what people do."

"no need, son. nothing can bring grandmother back to life. After a hundred and thirty five years she needs no prayers." I was just talking, trying to convince Kareithi why we shouldn't pray. I found that better than flatly telling him that I never prayed and that whenever I made the mistake of praying I got terrible results. He wasn't convinced I could see but agreed with me all the same.

"Do you have a hoe and a shovel?"

"Yes, but aren't we going to report to the chief first."

"After we have dug the grave, son. Bring the necessary items for digging a grave," I added hoping that he had a wider knowledge of the process than I did. That day we buried grandmother and I made sure that we met all her demands. I laid her where she wanted. That night we didn't sleep. Kareithi had made a big fire. We spent the whole night

beside the fire, with

me chain smoking and Kareithi weeping continuously.

A day later, I sat on a trunk of an old oak tree which was at the top most part of the piece of land which I had inherited. I lit a cigarette and observed the land while thinking. 'Land,' I thought. ' . . . just a simple word. It was because of land that people organized themselves and went into the bush to fight. Because of land my own father died, along with so many others while only managing to secure a negligible piece which his own sons were fighting over. Did he really have to go to the bush to fight?' I wondered. Life to me had started unfolding itself, showing me its ugly colours. Why was life such a big mystery? Wanting so many things and never giving someone contentment? Or at least a break, not unless you are dead.

The two cocks in the hut started crowing. I opened my eyes as I was dozing, looked at my watch and saw it was a few minutes to five o'clock. I lit another cigarette with the burning butt of the one I was just about to throw away and now started seeing things more clearly. All of a sudden I realized that Kareithi was not only weeping but the whole of his body was trembling violently. His eyes seemed so weak and sunk far deep into their sockets. He looked like he would fall dead any minute.

The day that followed was long and dull. When day broke, despite his illness, Kareithi untied the calf and released it to go to its mother who had started mooing very early in the morning. Me had then taken a large sufuria and followed the calf, not knowing what help I would give him, I just followed him. Me gave the calf about five minutes to suckle then pulled it from the mother. Me took a njungwa - stool and putting the sufuria under the udder of the cow, he started milking pulling two teats alternately. In a few minutes, we filled the two, one and half gallon containers. "Aren't you forgetting the calf, son. This is supposed to be its milk." I talked, trying to be good and kind and of course to break the silence which dominated the surround-

ing. Kareithi didn't answer immediately. Me took the milk and put it

some distance away from where we were. He then loosened the calf which hungrily rushed to the mother and started suckling. It tried one teat then the other and soon. As it did so, it hit the mother with its snout.

"When it hits the mother that way, the mother knows it is demanding for more milk and will immediately process some for it," Kareithi explained. Then the calf stopped moving from one teat to the other and then raised its tail upright. "That's it. Now if I go back to the cow I can milk some two to three more bottles. The calf will have more than it needs."

I smiled with understanding as I followed the young boy every where. But this kind of life was a very new experience to me and I had to be taught. I had to be patient.

After keeping the milk in an old cupboard that once belonged to my grandfather's hotel, Kareithi took a panga and I followed him out. We went down the eight acres of land to an area where napier grass was planted. He got busy cutting the grass and when he had cut what he thought was enough, he took a rope he had carried and tied one big bundle. I helped him to lift the load which he carried on his back. On reaching the cowshed, he put it down and untied it to feed the cow. The calf was now not suckling but running from place to place at very high speed with its tail upright in the air. The mother watched it sympathetically as if afraid it would fall.

Again we went down to the shamba but this time towards where maize was planted. Again, Kareithi got busy cutting the crops which he found weak. I also helped him in picking sweet potato vines. We both carried big bundles which we took to the cow. It was only then that Kareithi got convinced the cow had had enough for breakfast. "You must be joking. All that feed and you call it breakfast." But by ten o'clock the manger was completely empty.

By then, we had already taken our breakfast. I had brought a loaf of bread which we took with milk, now that I could afford to drink milk I didn't see why I shouldn't. At 10.30 am we again went to fetch more

feed for the cow. By then the calf had been tied in the hut and given a few sweet potatoe vines which it was chewing with difficulty.

After lunch we went for more feed and this time we fetched as much as we had gathered the whole day. Kareithi had argued that it was always advisable to have some feed nearby especially while milking in the morning. So we had done exactly as he had advised. By the time we were milking that evening, I was dead tired yet I had not done half the work Kareithi had done and he looked undisturbed. Soon after supper that evening, I went straight to sleep. I was very tired as I had not slept for hours and the chain smoking of the previous night had left too much nicotine in my lungs making my breathing difficult.

I was awakened by the mooing of the calf and its mother. This interrupted a dream in which I had become a lord and was giving orders to servants who worked for me in a mansion I owned in Muthaiga. I woke up with a start. It felt bad to realize I was still in a grass thatched hut and in the same room with a calf and of course sleeping on rags, completely the opposite of my wealth dream. Just because I had gained some two thousand shillings I had to dream about being a millionaire - what a shame!

I put on my shoes and reached for a cigarette. Something was wrong somewhere. I sensed that right away. It was unlike Kareithi to oversleep especially with all the noise the calf was making. On the other hand, day had broken and even the cocks and the hens we shared the hut with had gone out. I went to the kitchen room where Kareithi spread his mat made of banana fibres. He was there alright. I bent down to touch him. My heart was almost stopping with the fear that his 'fire', like grandmoth-

er's had gone off. I touched him. He wasn't dead since his body was hot, but to the extremes which told me he was sick, very sick in fact.

He opened his eyes and looked at me weakly. He tried to talk but he couldn't. I then noticed he was shivering. He changed from bad to worse as I talked to him and he only nodded to answer my question.

"Have you ever had this disease before? Would you know what you are suffering from?" He shook his head. This put me in a difficult position. I did not know what the cure for the disease was or even what help I could give. I had not come across a disease which made people unable to talk and to shiver so terribly.

"I have to take you to the hospital right away. Can you stand?" Again he shook his head. I bent down to help him but he gestured me to stop. I understood. He wanted me to attend to the calf and the cow before anything else.

The two hours which followed were a new experience. They were the most tiresome hours I have ever had in life. I had fetched a sufuria and untied the calf which left me and galloped to the mother who was waiting for it eagerly. It was good luck that Kareithi had insisted on having some extra feed for the cow the previous day so all I had to do was to transfer it to the manger. When I had done this, I tried to move the calf from the mother so that I could milk. It stepped on my foot hurting me very much and I still did not manage to remove it. I wanted to follow exactly what Kareithi had done the previous day but I couldn't. So I decided to let the calf suckle enough so that it would withdraw without resistance. I gave it a good twenty minutes. When it raised its tail upright as Kareithi had once explained, I pulled it away. I was right, its resistance was minimal. I didn't even have to tie it. It took off, running to and fro. At least I managed to milk a quarter of what Kareithi had milked before the cow consumed

all the feed and started throwing wild kicks in protest. The sight of what I managed to milk forced a weak smile from the sick Kareithi, a smile that seemed piteous. Thirty minutes later, I had gone to collect feed for the cow which took me one whole hour.

I diverted my attention to Kareithi when I was sure the cow was well provided for. That too was Kareithi's wish. He could not walk by himself since he was shivering like a leaf. I helped him to his feet intending to take him to the hospital. He had tried to take breakfast comprising milk and bread but had vomitted instantly. It was some kind of disease I had not encountered before. In any case I knew

almost nothing about various diseases. I would have hired a car for a few hundred shillings to take him to the hospital which he told me was some ten kilometres away. But he knew all the people who owned cars in the village and none would be home that morning. So we had to make the ten kilometres on foot with me carrying Kareithi on my back whenever I wanted us to make better progress. While crossing a certain river over the bridge, an idea of throwing him down the river to drown struck me. He was only saved when I remembered my grandmother's order, 'Take care of him when I am gone, son.'

I hated burdens and Kareithi was surely one right now. 'If this is how bright my star would shine,' I thought, 'then I was in for a great surprise.' Two days since grandmother's death and I was exhausted almost to death. Despite the milk I was taking and the constant feeding which of course was supposed to improve my health, I was certain I had lost some weight.

A factory lorry came to my rescue. I was climbing a small hill with the load on my back, every step forward wearing me out bit by bit. The driver of the lorry hooted and I looked at him. I saw him gesturing me to hurry to the hill top where he would stop. I covered that short distance in seven minutes. It was yet another job helping Kareithi get on board at the back of the

truck. Ten minutes later, we reached Muriranja Hospital where to my disappointment Kareithi was admitted into the ward. He was suffering from acute malaria.

The week Kareithi spent in the hospital taught me a number of things about myself. One, it confirmed to me that rural life was not meant for me. Two, I was one person who could not become even a fourth grade farmer. Three, that I was a very impatient person. Four, that I was after all a lazy man and that all the inheritance I had got was nothing to me. I used to visit Kareithi almost everyday as his quick recovery was of greater value to me than to himself. I badly needed his assistance. By the time he was discharged from the hospital my mind was set. I wasn't going to stay. Probably when she talked about a shining star, my grandma meant somewhere else. It certainly couldn't

be the way I was living then, I told myself.

Saturday morning came. It was exactly three weeks since I arrived in this location which now belonged to me. I couldn't believe I had stayed for only three weeks. It seemed years to me. My palms had become so hard that they bruised my face while washing. I felt so weak and each day that followed became more difficult to cope with. I had to go this Saturday, I decided.

I called Kareithi after he had milked and fed the cows. He had already prepared and taken breakfast which he normally did after all the morning's chores. From the way he looked at me he seemed to sense there was likely to be a great change of life here. I looked at the young innocent looking ambitious boy, not sure of what I was going to tell him and how to begin whatever I was to tell him. Then I got it. I was going to make him responsible of whatever I had inherited and give him freedom of doing whatever he preferred. He deserved it, he deserved more than that. Unfortunately, I didn't have more.

"Kareithi," I called. "I am leaving for Nairobi and I'd like to have a word with you before I do so. Whatever I am leaving behind will immedi-

ately be under your authority the moment I turn my back to this place." I stopped a bit to give him time to swallow that capsule of authority while I lit a fresh cigarette to give myself time.

"There isn't much I am leaving behind but from the way you people live here, it is no little. You can cut down the number of trees you need to build a better house to live in. This hut seems like it can fall any minute." He turned to look at the hut and seemed to disagree with my judgement. That didn't bother me since what I wanted was not to give the right judgement but to convey two things - that I trusted him and that I was leaving the place under all circumstances. I continued, "That is entirely under your discretion. You may continue living in it if you so prefer. I just wanted to make it clear to you that you are at liberty to do what you want. You can even sell that calf when its ready to leave the mother so as to finance yourself. Sell anything you want on this land." I added to his surprise. From the way he was looking at me,

silently listening to what I was saying, one would think he was staring at a ghost. "Listen, son," I continued, seeing that he wasn't going to comment, "there's no point of killing yourself with so much work. If you can afford to employ a labourer with the money you'll definitely make from the milk, you can do so. I would be crazy to expect you to work on these coffee trees all by yourself. You need someone to help you. You can even marry if you think it is that kind of help you need." I decided to stop here rest the boy thought I was crazy. He seemed to have formed such an idea. I took his hand, shook it friendly and as I released it, I dipped my hand into my pocket and gave him two hundred shillings.

I picked my bag and instinctively hung it at the same point it had got used to - my left shoulder. I turned my back to the rural wealth, and took off. Ten metres away I turned to view the place for what I thought was my last time. Kareithi was still standing where I had left him. When I looked more closely, to my surprise,

I realized he was weeping. That touched me. I had come to like the young boy but I had to go or risk getting a nervous breakdown.

I had been waiting at the bus stop for nearly ten minutes when I saw a boy running towards me. It was Kareithi. 'What has cropped up in the eleventh hour?' I asked myself. 'Or did I leave out some important things I should have advised him on?' I decided to wait and see. Just then, a matatu appeared. A tout jumped out of it and took my bag. I did not resist but I did not enter. I had to wait for Kareithi. When he came nearer, I noticed he was carrying a paper bag. The tout was complaining that there was another matatu just behind, but that didn't bother me. "Just bring my bag. I'll go with that one if you can't wait for two minutes." I said, not looking at him but at Kareithi. The boy arrived and extended his hand. I took the paper bag just as the other matatu emerged. The tout got hold of me and forced me into the vehicle whistling as he did so to warn the driver to take off. I lost balance and went crushing onto the breasts of a lady just opposite me. Several sadists grinned as the lady muttered venomous words. I regained my balance and sat just next to the lady who was then

looking at me as if she was looking at her refuse. I would have apologized, but that look made me become indifferent. For something to do, I opened the paper bag. It was the title deed for my inherited land and the two plots in this same trading centre. I wouldn't have thought about them, yet that was what I had inherited. Without the certificate, the land wouldn't be mine. 'I'll remember you for that kindness my dear Kareithi,' I vowed to myself, took the bag and put the papers there.

As we dangerously sped on the rough road which made every passenger silent, my thoughts were in the big city to which I was going back. It was true I was going back there better than I had left the place, but what was I going to do? What kind of a job would the money I had gained start? I had counted the

money that remained the previous night and realized I had spent about six hundred shillings. I recalled how I had spent the money. Most had gone to Kareithi, though not to his pocket. At the hospital I remembered the nurse, who had approached us on seeing how bad Kareithi was. He had told me, "Sir, I can see your young man here is terribly sick. But even if you stayed here for five hours, you'll not get anybody to attend to him. This place is rotten. If you can afford, you had better give a tip to one of these clinical officers here. You can see the number of patients waiting here and none of them has been attended to. And for your information, those you see seated on the forms arrived here between 5.30 am and 6.00 am. I could do anything to help you, but I am a trainee on practice and that apparently is the best help I can give you.' I stared at him in surprise. Not because a tip was required but because of the thought that a person who had arrived at 5.30 am had not been attended to by 12.15 pm and it was approaching lunch hour. There was no doubt that the staff would break off for lunch anytime from then.

"Thank you so much for the advice, now do me another favour and introduce me to one of these dignitaries."

"That I will do, friend. You will be surprised by the results." He left. Kareithi seemed to have known what happens. He didn't seem to

worry. He knew he had long to wait and he was ready to do so. But, there was one thing which he could not control -his shivering.

The trainee came back in five minutes. He asked me to leave Kareithi and follow him, which I did. "Listen," he told me. "You don't have to beat about the bush. Just go straight to the point. That is the game here." That, though he didn't know, was a game too familiar to me. All I needed was to see the corrupt medical officer.

I had carried a little over two hundred shillings. When I got to the officer, I produced one hundred shillings. I knew he would

have taken half of that but it was unfortunate that I hadn't prepared myself. He whisked it and it disappeared into one of his pockets. I didn't know which and I didn't care. I was very annoyed though I didn't show it. There was nothing I hated more than a corrupt person. He is paid for a certain job and he demands money so as to perform the very duties he is paid for. The clinical officer not knowing my loath for him patted me on the back while smiling. We left his office and once outside, he let us lead him to where Kareithi was. It was very hurting to see how concerned he pretended to be. This was intended to show other patients waiting that he was attending to this as a most urgent case, a thing that made him look good to the ignorant eye of the crowd.

That was the amount we had paid for the bed in a Government hospital. Then I gave another pound to the trainee for the work he had done, corruption being part of the day. I felt bad to have been attended to before those who had arrived as early as 5.30 am. But all this was not my fault. If I didn't do it, several things were going to go wrong. One, the cow was to go the whole day without food. Two, Kareithi was to get from bad to worse. Three, I was going to be forced to wait and when I got home, work very late. Four, it would not have improved the situation in the hospital even if I had tried not to be selfish. I had then bought a pair of gumboots and three blankets and clothes for Kareithi costing a total of almost three hundred shillings. On me that morning I had about two thousand and two hundred shillings. It was this money that I was now planning for. 'The shining star . . .' I thought. 'With two

thousand shillings what was I going to do?' Which was my star among the millions in the sky? There was no one to answer me - not even the Son of Fate - me.

Chapter Three

By the time I arrived in Nairobi, my mind was made up. There was no point of building castles in the air which I was sure would collapse. Two thousand shillings couldn't do much given that it was the same money I was going to depend on for food and shelter. So I decided to settle for a simple job that I had at least some little knowledge about. The one Papa taught me -shoe shining. I'd pick the most strategic point for my stand. I decided that would have to be near a city bus-stand and where there were several matatus. While people waited or alighted from matatus they found it advisable to look clean while they had the time. But before anything else, I had to make sure I got a place to live in. not much of a place, but to make sure I had a roof over my head. There was a way to get a place through the local newspaper.

I bought a Daily Nation newspaper and leaned against a 'NO PARKING' post and opened the Ads' page. 'S5 Properties to let' I read. Most of the houses, I realised needed tycoons who made twice as much money as I had daily. 'How could one afford a house rent of fifteen thousand shillings per month?' I wondered. Then I saw what was likely for me. I read: Ngara, Eastleigh, Kibera, single rooms - Shs 600, 400, 350/- vacant. I thought if I contacted these agents, they'd probably know of even a cheaper place. I took the address and headed for the office. Qillfilian Mouse, third floor - room number one.

The room turned out to be a tiny cell. There was a man seated behind a cheap table and before him was a seat for the customer. He welcomed me to the seat which creaked under my weight. I wondered whether it would accommodate a well fed person if my 60 kilogramme was so much for it. There was

a piece of paper on which different estates and houses available in each estate were listed. He extended the paper which I took without much interest. I knew he had made the same mistake most people

make from looking at me - thinking I had money.

The paper had a list of houses in various estates - Buruburu 4 B/R maisonette, Umoja 2 B/R, Qolden gate 4 B/R maisonette, Parklands 5 B/R. There wasn't any house for less than 1,500 shillings. I pushed the paper back to him with a smile. Before I could talk he told me, "Just mark the one you want and pay a deposit of two hundred shillings. We will give you someone to go and show you the house. If you like it then you can have it."

"Save your breath, mister," I interrupted after realizing he was going to talk on and on trying to convince me. "I want something far too cheap. I had seen some in the newspaper." I put the paper on the table and opened the page. "Here," I said indicating the 350/- single room. "If you could give me something for less than this, then you have yourself a deal. Is it possible?" Although it showed clearly that he was surprised, as a good salesman he did not show his disappointment. But I had already got my answer. "Yes ..." he said hesitatingly. "We have two places in Eastleigh and Kariobangi. Is two hundred and fifty good for you?"

"That's what I said," I retorted rudely. I knew I was wasting my time. While I was seated there, some instinct had started giving me harzadous signs. It was kind of a con game. Then I remembered Qichere.

Qichere shared a cell with me in gaol. He was a conman and he knew every con game that existed in the city of Nairobi as he operated one himself. It was an easy way of making money. He had told me, 'All you need is to have a convincing language. Before anything else, you pay for a column in the newspaper and advertise the type of houses you have on the written paper on your desk. Qetting a landlord who'll trust his house in the hands

of an agent is one of the many impossibilities in our city. So you have to fake your own houses in the estates we have. Sometimes that way, you gain some landlord's confidence and they come to see you when tenants flee their houses, which of course is very rare. Now, when a client comes, what you do is only push the printed list to him. Whatever he picks, let him pay a deposit of two hundred shillings or more. That will allegedly be an advance booking for the house plus the fare to be spent while your accomplice takes the client to the house. What happens is, every person you con will at long last get tired of coming every morning and evening waiting for a chance to be taken to the house because the accomplice to take him will never turn up. When you have had enough clients you just take off and your accomplice takes over the desk. You only need to put a notice saying

'OPENED UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT and the game is over.' With this knowledge packed in my mind, I had no doubt I had fallen prey to the very game I had been taught. I stood and without a word left the cell just as two potential customers knocked on the door to the office. 'If fools didn't go to the market,' I thought, 'bad wares would not be sold.' That was what kept these agents going - fools.

There was so much to be done and I did not have any more time to waste. After leaving the office, I went straight to do what I had already decided on. One thing was certain, I was going to spend a few hundreds in Harambee Lodgings while I looked for a shanty in which to live. This time again I visited Maish. In this kind of life, you didn't adhere to what you'd call principles. What kind of principles would a street man have? If he'd have some, going back to Maish's guest house was one I'd not have violated. I had swom never to go back there when I snatched a hundred shillings from him. But that was some few months ago. According to me, it was long enough to bury the past difference though I didn't care whether he had buried it or not. He needed patrons for his rooms as much as I needed his poor risky lodging and I

was certain we'd both see the sense in it and come to an agreement.

I took out a hundred shillings as soon as I entered his office and repeated the same words as last time, "One week.* I smiled to show him that as far as I was concerned, we had no difference. But I had forgotten one thing which would have cost me a lot. The last time we met he was the loser and not me and so wasn't likely to forget it in such a hurry. He snatched the money the way a chameleon flashes its tongue to an insect. I got the impression, he had got his hundred shillings back.

When he had safely put it in his pocket, he said: "I wish you know how much I hate people with a bad memory. Last time we met here, I told you never to come back. You didn't listen to me because you had made it in life. You had three hundred shillings in your pockets which to you was too much. I am grateful anyway because you've paid me my hundred shillings. Mow , can you please show me your back and bang

the door behind you just as you did last time." I digested all that. That was the language in these places and you had to get used to it.

I answered, "You talk too much, friend." I pulled a chair and sat as he listened, smiling ironically. "That hundred shillings can cost you plenty and you jolly well know it. I am in a hurry so can you show me my room." Instead of answering, he extended his hand over the table to me. He was demanding money for the room, meaning that the hundred shillings had been lost and that I had better forget about it. I wasn't going to give in so hurriedly. "If I leave this place right now Maish, two minutes later you'll be on your way to a police station. I hate keeping on reminding you that police hate fences more than they hate thieves. I have told . . ."

With a smile, he interrupted me by pushing the telephone on the table to me. "You don't have to travel all that way to the police station. Dial 999 and they'll be here in two minutes. Meanwhile, let me hear the explanation you'll give them about

this golden watch you were selling to me and I refused to buy. How did you get it in the first place? By the way do you know how much that watch costs in a shop? I am sure you don't. It's current price is fifteen thousand shillings. Fancy a man wearing such an expensive speedmaster and he cannot afford a better lodging.*

I looked at the watch as if I had not seen it before. I knew it was expensive alright but I had not thought that a money hungry person would blackmail me using it. I was certain that if the police got to it, I would not have an explanation. It would not send me behind bars because there would be no complainant, but the police would go with it while they nabbed me. I was beaten. I went back into my pocket and produced another hundred shillings. I was given a ticket for one week.

We looked at each other with much understanding. I knew what was in his mind just as he knew what was in mine concerning what had just happened. I took the bag off my shoulders and put it on the table. I told him, "They say tit for tat is a fair game. You are justified to do that, Maish.*

"I am glad you understand. You are quite a gentleman Sheriff,* he interrupted.

"Don't misunderstand me, Maish." I retorted seeing he didn't get what I meant. *That certainly isn't the end of the game. That hundred shilling note has set me a hundred and one paces backwards and I'll do my best to recover it when a good chance arises. Meanwhile keep this bag for me while we are still friends. Let everything in it be there when I come back if you are not tired of life. By the way, when did you see Capone last?*

"Capone doesn't need HL any more. Me is driving a DX these days. He conned his way to riches almost two months ago.*

So his star shone? I found myself muttering unwillingly my grandmother's words which were engraved in my memory. 'When would mine shine?' I wondered as I closed the door behind me.

From Maish's office, I went straight to Qikomba, this time not for michugi but to order two stools and a shoe shine stand. I wanted to start the job the soonest possible. After paying a deposit of a hundred and fifty shillings, I left. Along the road, I came across polishing brushes. I bought several remembering that Papa had six. I left and visited a supermarket. It was long since I had gathered enough guts to enter a supermarket.

But with something close to two thousand shillings in my pockets at that time of the month, I ranked high. Mere I bought polish. I made sure I bought different colours and I was satisfied. I carried the bundle to Maish's office where I put them in my bag. I decided to call it a day and went for supper.

I started the shoe shining job precisely ten days since I hit the city. Three days earlier, I had moved to a shanty in Mathare, just three rows of shanties away from where Kahungura had hers. By coincidence, the landlady happened to be the same. She didn't remember me, but the moment I was introduced to her, I almost changed my mind about renting her shanty. I had bought a second hand bed and a mattress. I

had other things that I needed in the shanty. All the things I found necessary while I lived with Kahungura and her family who had left me almost bankrupt. So when I shifted to this new place, I had reminded myself of what Maish had done to me and knowing that this was a lame excuse, it still justified helping myself with two blankets and two bed sheets from his lodging. I promised myself to make certain I never again met Maish - ever.

Life as a shoe-shiner was as interesting as that of living in Mathare Valley. I wasn't the only shoe shiner in the area. Most of us lived there. Talk of private life, and there's nothing like that in the shanties of Mathare Valley. If private life means staying alone or having your own shanty, then there is privacy in Mathare. But in the shanties, your neighbour is in a position to monitor whatever is going on in your room with minimal effort.

If you are not a heavy sleeper, you'll certainly not sleep in the shanties because a creak from your neighbour's bed also sounds in your room. You have also to get used to different kinds of neighbours. Those who brew chang'aa keep customers up to the wee hours of the morning. They make so much noise that you also get drunk. If a radio sounds in your room the following morning it's gone. You have to keep a low profile and forget any kind of taste you might have in life. A person who goes to work every morning leaving nobody in his shanty, leaves behind only what they can afford to lose. Good clothes will encourage a break in. You have to live entirely the 'shanty way.' There are no toilets at all and most people just move a few metres from the shanties, close their eyes and then help themselves. Those who are a bit dignified do it differently. They get back to their shanties and spread a sheet of paper or worn out cloth on the floor. After relieving themselves they tie the bundle and throw it away when darkness comes. When rain comes it sweeps all this refuse to the river below in which the famous chang'aa from Mathare is brewed.

Preachers of various denominations hold open air sermons. But the gatherings which surround them go there with quite opposite intentions. They at least go to see what they can possibly rob from the

strangers who know very little about the valley. How can you convince a person who brews chang'aa as a means of survival that doing so was a sin? How can you stop a person who smokes one roll of 'begi' daily so as to forget his tribulations that it is a sin to do so? And how can you convince people that from all those sins they'll be sent to hell, while they believe they are already in hell and most of them were born there? What sin would you say they committed to necessitate their birth in what they believe is hell?

Strangers in this valley make sure they don't revisit the place after they leave. A stranger's shoe is sold while it's still on the

owner's foot. If a 'valley robber' is promised a hundred shillings for a pair of boots, the victim will be very lucky to get away all in one piece. The residents just watch while you struggle trying to save yourself. When the assailant gets into the dark alleys between the shanties he is swallowed up and in any case there is no one interested in his pursuit. They have a common belief that any well fed man is an exploiter.

Like in any other place, every one in the valley is busy all the year round. Kids of ages between ten and fifteen earn their bread by supplying the valley with water. With their home made wagons they supply water all over the valley at fifty cents per 'debe'. The same system is used to supply chang'aa by the same kids at a better price. Over seventy-eight per cent of the residents are sods. They drink to forget their problems and pass days more easily towards their goal - death. A good number of people that have been bom and brought up in the valley have never visited the city centre. They like it there and they feel inferior such that the idea of mixing up with those in the city centre or those who can afford a better life is a dream to them. These are the people I was living with. People who's anger is easily provoked, especially when they think you are trying to show your seniority or abilities. Anyone smoking a cigarette better than riyota needs close observation. Anyone who can afford such luxuries can as well afford a better household and the house needs a visit.

In this valley, I felt rich. I was among those who were doing well and my morale went high the moment I entered the valley from work. My

inferiority complex got me whenever I sat on my low stool to polish a shoe for a man, bom of woman just as I was. But I had to do it. This job has to have someone doing it. We cannot all be equal no matter how hard we tried. But why me? Why did fate have to pick on me?

But I knew if one engaged in such thoughts, he couldn't do

anything well. So I forgot about myself and continued living the life of the wretched of the earth. May be one day just as my dead grandma said, my star would shine. But I doubted when and what would make it shine anyway.

Within two weeks, I was doing well. Very well in fact until my workmates thought I was a dangerous competitor. I had to be good anyway because I once belonged to that class and I knew what the people of that class liked. You just 'Sir' them and you get a very heavy tip. As I worked on, I came to like the job. Mot that it was the best but because I had nothing better and you must like what you have to do in order to do it well.

I saved every penny I got. This was not a time for careless spending. I had freedom and that was all I needed. Life in jail had taught me that free dom was the most important thing in one's life. Every other thing came crawling behind freedom. What else did I need in life? Poverty had destroyed my ego. I couldn't think of life in a better sense. What else was there in life but to live, to be alive. Things like marriage and having children were out of question. Why give myself a load that I could not carry. Why involve a person I love in my problems, bring forth children into this cruel world to become slaves for others, no, I blamed my own father for doing this and I wasn't going to do it myself. There was no difference between marrying in the shanties and in the streets.

"Yes, customer," I hit the shoe shine stand with a brush and called by reflex. A man sat on the stool in front of me and stepped on the stand. He had a white shoe on which needed some cream. I worked on it and he flashed a five shilling note to me whose change he didn't wait for. After him there came a lady, then another man and another. I looked

at my watch and saw it was 9.30 am. I was about to light a cigarette when a fifth man took the seat. I put the cigarette aside and attended to him. Again I was given a tip that morning. I smiled as I stood up. It was

the end of the month and people could afford to be generous. I left my stand towards a cafe which was nearby. After attending to five customers, we always went for breakfast. After five people, you had made enough money for two large tins of shoe polish and some cash above so you were justified to go for breakfast. That was one sign which told workmates the minimum you'd made in the morning.

The attendants in the cafe had become friends because we met everyday. At times they borrowed money from us for bus fare which they paid at the end of the month. The generous one paid with good interest though we never demanded for the interest. But all the same, we liked lending the money because that way, one made good savings.

A young man I had lent a total of sixty-five shillings came to serve me. He didn't wait for me to make an order since he knew what most of us took when there wasn't money and what we took at the end of the month. It was the end of the month so along with the tea, he brought a hamburger. When I had finished, he came back and said, "That's on me and here is what you lent me over the month." He was extending his hand to me and in it had a hundred shillings. That was too generous. It took me by surprise which made me wonder what kind of luck I had that morning.

At the door, as I went out, two workmates entered. I knew they too had met the required number. We smiled at each other understanding[^] and parted. I took my seat and after taking a brush, started the normal routine in this kind of job. I hit the stand and called, "Yes customer, welcome for some polish, Sir . . ." A distance away about five yards, I spotted a couple coming. My instincts started working. They did it automatically when I was about to encounter some excitement. Some customer sat and put his foot on the stand for polishing. But my eyes were not on him. I saw a shadow from the corners of my eyes. My mind

and eyes and all senses in general were on the couple especially the lady and the kid she was moving hand in hand with. A very well dressed kid of about ten years. The customer on my stool moved to the next stand. He was surprised. When I turned I saw that he was trying to see what ghost was approaching me, making me to forget my job. The couple approached and my eyes told me I was not wrong. I knew the person I was staring at, the lady and the kid.

The man who was the husband, sat on my stool. With shaking hands, I selected a brush. I was about to start polishing when I realised I was using the wrong brush for a dark tanned shoe. The customer was about to complain when I changed it. I had even forgotten to put a cloth around the foot to protect the socks from getting shoe polish. All this time my eyes were on the kid, and at times the mother. 'What a day?' I thought. 'Why did this have to happen?' The kid came and put his hand on me. His hand on my shoulder sent storms of warmth in my body. I started shivering like I had a cold. But not much to be noticed by anybody. The kid called, "Uncle , will you polish mine as well?"

"Yes I'll do that. Let me finish with daddy first," I answered. My voice was trailing off and I couldn't recognize it myself. I looked up to face the mother. Our eyes met and she looked away. I hadn't met her for a very long time.

From my stool, I stole innumerable glances at her. She hadn't changed much from when I knew her. She was smartly dressed just as she always was. She was of medium height, brown with every teeth white. Her hair appeared to have just come from a hair dresser and the perm she always admired made her appear the most beautiful lady in the city. With her fancy dresses, you had to think twice before you thought of approaching her. She looked damn expensive. She was always that way even when she was my wife - Joy. The boy whose hand was still on my shoulder was my own son. That was some eight years back,

before I went to prison. I didn't have to ask the kid his name. I knew it since I had named him after my father.

I gathered more courage and again faced the lady. She looked away once more. It was certain that she did not want the husband to know that she even knew me. It was so hurting but there was nothing I could do about it. The kid talked to me again. "Uncle, will my shoes become as good as daddy's?" Before I answered as it was with difficulty that I did it the mother pulled the kid away from me, telling him not to disturb me. The kid protested, freed himself and came back to me, back on my shoulder. "Am I disturbing you, uncle?"

"No, no, no," I said and more words failed me. Later the father left the seat and the kid took over. While I polished his shoes, I answered innumerable questions from the kid. The father who had taken the second stool, where the wife was seated as she waited, would only smile seeing how much the kid pressed me with intelligent questions. The kid seemed too bright for his age. The father then took a newspaper and dismissed us. The kid's mother had moved to shop's window a few metres away. She was aware my eyes were on her as the memory of the good time we used to have together occupied my mind. Now she had another husband who no doubt was a tycoon. As a shoe polisher, I could tell the cost of any shoe from looking at it and the one this gentleman was wearing had not cost less than a thousand shillings. He had an imported grey suit on and his fat cheeks shone like they were themselves polished. He looked great.

My mind went back to the lady-Joy Myambura. What was she doing now? After the birth of the kid, she had requested me to allow her to go to college to do a CPA course. I had agreed and encouraged her to do so. By then I was a renowned journalist and the two of us had made a great combination. But I had been nabbed and sent to prison before she had gone to the college.

We had spent almost all the money we had by engaging a lawyer and trying to corrupt the judge to secure my release but all in vain. The judge had sent me in. Three years later, Nyambura had abandoned me and remarried. From the way she carried herself as I looked at her while polishing my son's shoes, the lady had advanced. Her ambition had not failed her.

I finished the job just as she came back. The husband asked her whether she was to have hers polished which she objected by simply shaking her head. He took out a ten shilling note and gave me. "You can buy cigarettes with the change," he told me. He had, I guessed, liked the friendship between me and his step son. As the kid left the stool, the man had turned to go. I took the kid's hand and put the ten shilling note in his hand.

With a smile, he closed the hand and said "Thank you. What do you want me to buy?"

That surprised me. I had not thought of that and I didn't know kids needed to be instructed when they were given presents in form of money. Thinking quickly, I said, "A tennis ball." I didn't know whether the money was enough for it or not. I hoped so. The mother, with a hidden smile took the kid's hand and they-left. A few steps away, the kid turned to look at me. I was staring at them just as I had when they were coming. The kid waved, looked forward as he suppressed a step and again looked back. He waved again. He went out of sight waving happily at me.

I don't know for how long I sat there staring vacantly at the comer where my son had gone out of sight. But I was certain it wasn't for less than ten minutes. My workmates realised that I was deep in thought and it was only after they called me that I came back to reality.

"Wamathina . . . Wamathina . . . Wamathina ..." I heard it like in a day dream. Then I saw something fall just in front of me on the stand. I faced where it had come from. Then I came back to my senses. It was my friends calling. "What is the

matter?" one asked jokingly, "Has the woman hypnotized you? And man, that kid looks like he has your blood in him. If that lady didn't belong to the heavenly class one would surely believe that the kid is yours." They all laughed to what they thought was a great joke.

But I wasn't with them. My mind was far away. I was wondering why the world was so cruel to some people and why fate was so partial, so

selective and biased. Just when I had started getting some hope in my life something comes up which reminds me that I was supposed to be a nobody. That I was bom to serve and not to be served. That anything good belonged to the chosen ones. Wasn't I bom of woman like any other man? Like those whose shoes I was polishing? Like those who were driving and who dined in the so called class 'D' hotels? Did I have to feed in kiosks along the roads all my life? Was fate so cruel such that even a good son shouldn't belong to his reject of a father? Why . . . why . . . why? Words failed me. Unconsciously, I took a polishing brush and threw it away. It missed a pedestrian on Tom Mboya Street by inches. I stood up and lit a cigarette. I looked towards heaven, where preachers and believers said Qod lived. I wanted to try my luck and see whether he would show up so that I would ask him a few questions. He wasn't anywhere. All I saw was the bright hot sun. Or was the sun the famous Qod? Ho. According to the Bible which I had so widely read while in prison, the sun wasn't Qod. The Bible talked of the Qod of Israel; Qod of Ibrahim, Qod of Issac and Qod of Jacob. Where did I come in? Or had I been making a mistake all the way along? Was Qod supposed to be for chosen few just as richness on this earth seemed? Had the Bible told me something of the kind? I was burning with fury and regrets. How could a woman I knew, a woman who once belonged to me, a woman who begot my only child on this earth pretend not to know me just because I was reduced to a shoe shiner? That she couldn't let the son

Know his real father? I remembered Job cursing the day he was born. For the first time, I was quite in agreement with him.

I left my stand and went to a shop just opposite. All the people around, workmates, thier customers and layabouts stared at me. They hadn't missed a single thing I had done, and the curses I blasted to whoever controlled the planet Earth, but that didn't worry me. I had so many things and much to worry about.

I ordered a soda and a cake. I was feeling neither thirsty nor hungry. But I wanted something to keep me busy. Something to bring my thoughts back to normal, back to this earth I was living in, because

right then I was lost in the world of the evil one, a world of hatred, hopelessness and uncertainty.

I put the tasteless soda on the table and threw the cake in the dustbin. They weren't helping my state of mind. The encounter with my former wife and son had destroyed me in all ways.

I paid for the half drunk soda and the half eaten cake and left the shop. Outside, on the verandah, I lit a cigarette. I needed something stronger than a soda to shake off my present mood. I thought of a few bottles of beer. It was years since I tasted beer and I hated the idea of going back to beer after such a long time, but I had to do it. 'It's the only thing.' I thought, 'that can give me rest right now.'

I crossed Tom Mboya Street towards Mercury Restaurant. At the centre of the road, a car driven by an Indian with a very huge chest and a small head screeched to a stop right at my heels. If I had checked the road before I decided to cross, then I had checked the wrong side of the road. Other cars came to emergency stops avoiding a collision with the leading car. Tyres screeching like sirens and producing smoke as the tarmac protested from being rubbed so violently by the wheels. Every driver blasted curses at me while pedestrians and some layabouts whistled at the narrow escape, but I neither looked back nor stopped to think. I went straight ahead, crossed to the right side

of Tom Mboya Street and entered Mercury Restaurant with the cigarette dangling from my mouth. What would it matter if I died, a reject like me whose only duty on this earth was to serve others and suffer. I could feel a hundred pairs of eyes on me but I wished they'd only stop pitying me and mind their own business.

"The standing corpses," I cursed.

In the hotel, I went straight to the bar. It was too early for beer but I had my own reasons. The cashier was there all alone at the counter. There were some people in the hotel but they were all taking either tea or coffee. At the bar I pushed a high stool aside and leant against the counter, my hand on top. "Tusker Premium please," I said. The cashier

looked at me without a word then turned to the shelves and brought me one bottle. He opened it and pushed it towards me. Me turned to fetch a glass for me but by the time he had dusted it and turned to give me, three quarters of the contents in the bottle had been transferred into my belly.

While he looked at me in surprise, I put the empty bottle on the counter and gestured him to refill. Now with a stupid smile, he gave me another one which I drained at the same rate. I took four such bottles in a great hurry. As I swallowed the last half of the fifth bottle, things turned against me and the beer started taking the upper hand over me. My stomach started protesting that kind of treatment and the next minute I was on my knees vomiting unceasingly.

I opened my eyes after vomiting almost everything from my stomach. Then all my senses started playing me tricks. I saw the restaurant and everything in it spinning at a terrible speed, with me right at the centre. My tongue felt so bitter I spat after every two seconds. I heard trumpets, saxophones, guitars, drums and vocalists sounding in my head while people were screaming and shouting happily to the cacophony. I strained my eyes to look at my hands which felt wet with something I did not know. My

eyes perceived blood. I was dying, no doubt about it, I thought. I let out one loud scream which surpassed a combination of all what I was hearing. Then I felt a strong arm lift me up. "What is it, mister? Haven't you ever tasted beer in your life?" It was the cashier. When I looked around, I saw some people had come closer, maybe to help me, or probably to help the cashier if I became violent. Either way I didn't like it. I looked at them one at a time, my mind telling me that they were all grinning at me, ready to pounce on me any minute from now. Death was certain. I became sure about it. But I wasn't going to die here, not with people grinning at me. Without warning, I took off screaming.

I got back to the road, Tom Mboya Street, still screaming. Whether or not there were any vehicles on it, I didn't care but I just went ahead crossing. Like before, I was lucky not to get hit as cars came to

emergency stops every time and the tyres screeched to a halt. The cashier who was likely to stand a loss of five bottles of beer had followed me to the road, but unlike me, he couldn't stand the risk of getting crashed by the weight of a Kenya Bus filled to capacity so he gave up the chase.

Outside Qill Mouse, where my polishing stand was, I saw about five workmates stand up simultaneously. They started towards me and my mind told me that like the others, my own friends had decided to give me a beating. I was going to fight it out, I decided. Some years back, I had joined a karate club, the only game I ever enjoyed whenever I had nothing to do. I mean, whenever I wasn't drinking. There's nothing I liked better than chopping and getting chopped now and then and right now, I felt like it. I stopped running to wait and see whether my suspicions were correct. Yes, they were. The five boys approached me, very warily. I prepared myself. I set myself the way my coach had taught me. I remembered everything he had told me. 'Never panic even if your assailant is better armed. Just stare at him straight in the eyes anticipating his possible move.' I did that,

remembering that my coach always bragged about me being a promising fighter.

My friends got nearer. The kick which I released got the leading friend to the ground. I knew I would take them by surprise, the reason being that they didn't know I was very close to a trained fighter. By the time my right foot touched the ground, the left foot was high in the air, crashing into the chin of the second friend who was not less than five feet eight inches tall. As he staggered away, the third one attacked from the back. By instinct, I turned in time to encounter a straight punch which no doubt was aimed at the back of my head. I jerked my head a bit to the left and went for the straight punch, with my right hand. I got hold of it, pulled him towards me and turning a bit, I lifted him over my shoulder and hurled him in the air. I heard people clapping their hands while some laughed mannerlessly. They were enjoying the drama just as I was. I could see my performance had scared my friends, none now seemed in a hurry to get their paws, on

me. But they weren't going to give up, not after what I had done. It would be a great shame in the eyes of the great crowd that had gathered. When they approached me the next time, they were very careful. We fought for some ten good minutes, then somehow, I lost ground.

I felt something hard and heavy land at the back of my head. I turned to retaliate but I was too weak as I felt dizzy and tired, very tired. I felt my body needed urgent rest. I became too weak to do anything else but rest. I forced my eyes open and the first thing I saw was a helmet. A cop? Was it a cop who had done it. I couldn't be certain because my sight was very weak. Then I went down and I felt some hands support me. From then on, I felt nothing else and I blacked out. 'Goodbye Sonny, you are dead. That's the end of your problems. See you in hell.' I heard a mocking voice at the centre of my head as I passed out.

I felt some fresh air hit my nostrils and I breathed in. The air

felt so sweet that I inhaled in again, deep into the lungs. I felt so comfortable lying down facing upwards. I wriggled my back a bit and felt I was on a comfortable bed. 'What a nice dream/ I thought. 'And why do I always dream with comfort like a lord and this is something I can never afford?' I wished the dream would go on and on until the end of the world because this was the only way I could afford a rich life - through a dream. My wishes woke me up and I opened my eyes. Alas! It wasn't a dream after all. I saw a concealed electric bulb facing me, welcoming me to the world of consciousness. Yes, I was sleeping on a very comfortable clean bed. I was in a room all alone. A room bigger than two cells combined together. I looked around myself. On my left, beside the bed, I saw a bedside locker. On top of it, I saw a packet of cigarettes, my gas lighter, my wrist watch and my wallet. I sat up on the bed, not believing what I was seeing. I pinched myself on the thigh to make sure I wasn't dreaming. The sharp pain assured me I wasn't. It was all very true. But how did I afford this luxury? Where on earth was I? How did I get here wherever this might be? I struggled with my memory but I could not get an answer. I felt tired and my whole body felt weak as I struggled in my brains. 'Probably . . .', I thought, ' . . . if I

do a few press-ups my body will feel different and my brain will function well.' I decided to get out of bed and do the press-ups, then probably after a cigarette, everything will become clear.

As I got out of the bed, I felt a sharp pain on my left buttock. I touched the point with my hand and felt a small swelling like a pimple. I squeezed it between my two fingers and it got out. I observed what I had got very closely and saw it was dried blood. Why hadn't I thought about it. Of course I was in a hospital and they had given me an injection. By reflex I found myself looking for something on the bedside locker. I didn't know what exactly I was looking for but I found myself doing it. Then I saw what I had in mind - an in-patient card.

I picked it and read 'Adams Wamathina.' I read in a hurry to see why I should be hospitalized. "Anxiety*", I read aloud. What a funny thing? I smiled as I put the card down. Would a thing like this warrant hospitalization? I knew what the word meant literary - 'a feeling of hopelessness, not sure about the future.' But whatever else might be said the doctor was a genius. If anything, I had the feeling of hopelessness and the future to me was a big dream - a blank.

How did I get here? And who is going to pay for all this luxury given that this is a private hospital? 'Press-ups before anything else, then a cigarette and you'll get all the answers,' said the voice in my head. I moved away from the bedside locker and stretched myself on the floor with my clenched fists against the hard floor. I started . . . one . . . two . . . three. I went on and on up to fifty. I was still physically fit. Fifty press-ups confirmed it. When I got up, I felt quite okay. Now a cigarette.

While I smoked, I wrestled with my memory. I started an account of how I had got up that morning, boarded a bus route number nine for town, got to my stand, the first customer, the second up to the fourth. I went to the cafe for breakfast, back to the stand until I came to the couple with a kid. Everything became clear, "Oh my!" I started again as I remembered the encounter. I saw the kid trotting beside his mother, turning to wave at me as if to tell me that, "You are my true

daddy but your poverty has meant that we do away with you. Me and mummy belong to the superior class and you daddy belong to the inferior one. Look daddy, if we came back to you, can you really afford to take me to a good school? Can you afford the life style which me and mummy live? We are sorry daddy but we can't cope. Bye Bye daddy." Then I saw the mother and her picture came back to me as she went swinging her hips and buttocks as if purposely to mock me. I remembered how she pretended not to know me. How she was preventing the clean kid from

getting into contact with his dirty reject of a father. My head started aching. I hid my face between my hands with tears almost falling. Then my comforter came, 'Son of Tate, what's this you are doing to yourself? Why bother yourself with things you have no control over? The kid is gone and forever. You said it yourself, you belong to the inferior class, they belong to the opposite. You are two accurate parallel lines which will never meet. Just relax and forget about beautiful rich wives and good sons who do not need you. Think of your home. Yes, Wamathina, the slums where you belong. Think of your shanty in Mathare Valley where nobody on this earth can envy you about or send you away from. Yes, sonny, that's where you belong, don't doubt it. Think of your bed which is invested by bedbugs which crawled from your neighbour's shanty. Think of how you can get rid of those termites and you have yourself a nice quiet place.'

I hurled the cigarettes which had now become bitter across the room to the furthest corner. I stood up, picked my watch and put it on. I picked my lighter, then my wallet which I unzipped and saw I had three hundred and fifty shillings. I put it in my pocket. I had to leave. I wasn't going to stay in a hospital which I was sure I couldn't afford. Who was to pay for it if I had spent a whole night. I checked the time and saw it was ten minutes past five.

Somehow, I had got here and somehow I was going to get out. But first, the plan, where was this hospital? What if I was caught red handed sneaking away? I got to the door and tried it. It wasn't locked. That gave me some assurance and hope. Now the plan. I went back to

the bed and sat, took out a cigarette and lit it. I took the card. There was no way I could fold it without spoiling it and I wanted to take the prescriptions so that I would go and buy medicine if I became sick again. I couldn't understand a thing written on it apart from the disease. I decided to cut the part with the prescriptions, then the door opened and a

young lady dressed in white appeared. Her eyes went straight to the card which was now halfway cut. Then she looked at me. We stared at each other suspiciously, with me feeling guilty. Then she gathered some courage and entered. "Oh . . . Hello. You are up at last. How are you feeling? You should be in your bed resting." I didn't answer. She came closer and put her hand on my shoulder, then touched my forehead with the back of her hand. "Go back to bed please. How are you feeling?" she repeated.

"Well I feel a bit dizzy but I think I am alright. How did I get here and where I am? That's the only thing that doesn't seem to add up with my day's movements."

"Worry less about that for the time being. I'll let you know but right now you must rest. Get back to bed. I want to fetch some food for you. You must be very hungry."

"I think I am alright madam. Now I've got to be frank with you. I can't afford this luxury. If I spend a night here, I am sure you'll have to detain me here till the end of the world because there's no one who can pay for my stay and I've got no money at all. After all, I am only suffering from anxiety and this is something I can control." I saw her smile. It seemed meaningless to me. Don't people like frank guys? I stood up. "I've got to go, madam. I can afford to pay for the few hours I've been here but for more than that I can't. I wish you'd take me seriously. "

"Well, if that's what's bothering you, it has been taken care of. There's a certain welfare association which brought you here. They are responsible for everything. Please get back to bed. Apart from anxiety we are suspecting something more serious. You have an appointment

with the specialist this evening but he wants you to have as much rest as possible before he sees you." But I wasn't listening any more. That was what I guessed she had said. My mind was somewhere else. That I wasn't going to be responsible for the charges was one thing

that lifted me sky high. A certain welfare association. Which association would take interest in an unknown shoe shiner?' I wondered. But the last two words gave me the answer- Welfare Association of Shoe Polishers.

Two months after becoming a shoe shiner, I had dreamt of the idea of forming a welfare association so as to promote ourselves. The association whose membership fee was a hundred shilling to be paid in instalments, of twenty shillings per month, was aimed at helping its members when they got misfortunes of any kind. When I gave this idea to my immediate workmates, they had jumped at the idea and within a month, we had about sixty five members scattered all over Nairobi. I became its founder member and its chairman. Apparently I had become the first member to be assisted by the association. With this in mind and thanking myself for having had such a great idea, I kicked off my shoes with a smile.

"I think you are right, madam. I am not feeling well and I need some rest. You are right too about the hunger. I am very hungry. I can afford this luxury alright." She smiled with understanding and left. I enjoyed the comfort wishing the specialist would give me this room for about a month. That would be enough time to get well, I thought.

After a very heavy meal, which was served fifteen minutes later by the same nurse, I lit another cigarette and continued smoking lying on my back facing the ceiling. No matter how much I tried to avoid it, I found myself flashing back to the time when I encountered my former wife and my son. The problem was that every time I remembered this, I'd feel so bad that my senses would start playing poker on me. I remembered what the nurse had said about suspecting a more serious case. What would it be? Megalomania or something worse than that? The door opened again after about forty minutes. The same nurse appeared. She seemed in a hurry to clean up the room. She took

the dishes away then came back. "The specialist will see you in five minutes. Please don't light another cigarette. She went to the fan and switched it on. In three minutes the room was filled with fresh air. Five minutes later, the specialist entered the room. Ten minutes later, I was discharged. How unfortunate!

We exchanged glances with the nurse when the psychiatrist announced his findings. She had understood I wouldn't have minded spending a few more days in the comfort. Our earlier dialogue had told her what my fear was and how quickly I had changed my mind after learning I wasn't taking the responsibility of the hospital charges. After she had brought me a packet of tablets and instructions of how to use them, I requested her to escort me to the gate. Reluctantly, I followed her out.

When we reached the gate, she stopped and we shook hands. Without a word but a smile which I had almost got used to within the hours we had been together, she turned and headed back to the hospital. I stood where she left me, watching her swinging her buttocks in a musical rhythm which had started somewhere in my head. When she was swallowed up by the walls, I turned and left with the sweet music still playing somewhere in my head. This made me doubt whether the psychiatrist was really right in discharging me.

The hospital name at the gate didn't tell me where I was and I didn't want to ask anybody. I followed the road from the hospital for a short distance and came to a major one. Along the roads there were large residential buildings with cars parked outside. This area was no doubt an area of the superior mankind. On the major road, I saw a group of people a few meters away. They didn't seem to me to be together so I suspected it was a bus-stand. I moved towards them. A white Missan appeared yet from another major road and got into the one I was moving along. As it came nearer, I saw a sign board reading 'Parklands'. There were only a few passengers inside.

When it reached the road to the hospital, it made a U-turn and all the passengers got out when it stopped. By the time it reached me, I saw the board read 'Town'. I then knew I was in Parklands.

I took a seat in the Nissan. I wanted to get to town from where I would immediately take another vehicle to Eastleigh and then I would walk to my home - Mathare Valley. I found myself thinking again about the day. It was difficult to believe that all what I had encountered had happened within the same day. I felt so old and beaten. The sight of the people I was seated with in the car and others in the streets made me feel too inferior. Why did I have to meet them while I was so cheap? 'What did I do to you, oh you who controls this universe such that you've thought of demoralizing me to this extent? Why did you have to take all the hope I had in life? When will I ever . . .?' Then my invisible friend intervened, 'Son of Fate, remember what I told you. You have a place which no one can claim. Get there, lie on your bed and face where the ceiling is supposed to be. Think of a better future. Gather as much hope as possible and avoid those little negative termites of self doubt, lack of self confidence, suspicion of inferiority and so on. Your star will shine and the moment it does, all what you are encountering will be gone. It will be history. Wamathina dear, don't make the mistake of losing hope because when that one is gone, you are gone with it. Hope, sonny boy, hope should be the last thing man should lose!' What a comforter I have, right in the centre of my head! I thought as the Nissan came to a stop outside the Fire Station. I got out and immediately I did so moved towards Nation Mouse where I took matatu Number 9 for Eastleigh. 'Just move on, move on sonny boy and you are home.' It took the 'Rosa' matatu under ten minutes to get me there.

I alighted at St. Teresa's Church. At the gate, I stopped. I had an idea of seeing a friendly catholic priest who had helped me

once, Father Qrol. When I checked the time, I saw it was around 6.15 pm. He would be conducting mass by this time, I told myself and decided to see him another day. He was good at restoring peace and hope in a person and I would see him even if only to tell him the story. I crossed Juja Road and entered Mathare.

You knew you had entered Mathare Valley the moment you breathed the surrounding air. It was ever polluted but you got used to it as you

stayed. Only this time, it was worse. There was a smell of burning rubber, burning clothes, burning papers and so on, such that it was difficult to tell what smell was dominant. The sky above looked grey with smoke. "What can this be?" I asked myself. My instincts started pinching from within. I moved ahead wondering what danger awaited me. I was certain that something was wrong.

I reached the municipal council beer club and stopped like I had come to a brick wall. What I saw here could only have one explanation which I didn't want to believe. Children and their mothers sat in groups. The children crying and mothers trying but in vain to comfort them. Each group had bundles near it. There were sufurias, tins, cups, kettles and other utensils near them. "Oh my! This can't be true. It just can't be true. This is one long dream which will come to an end the moment I wake up. Yes, I'll wake up and find that I am dreaming and I'll be a very happy man then, I said to myself." But it was useless to try and avoid the truth. 'Son of Fate, this is Mathare Valley alright. Don't stand there staring at people like you've gone to the wrong place. This is where you belong, where you have a shanty, your own shanty for which you have paid six months in advance. Yes, in your shanty, you have all the savings you had dug a hole for and hidden under the bed. Just move on sonny boy and get to your shanty where all your belongings are. You have taken a heavy supper so you won't bother cooking this time. All you'll

do is get there, lie on your bed and think while you light a cigarette, one after the other. Plan your savings well and you'll see what it means to have your star shining. Yes, planned well, you can build your own shanties for renting. Yes, you can become a landlord too. Sonny boy, fate can't mistreat you a time like this when you need all his assistance. Just move on, your shanty is just a few paces from here, move on sonny boy, move.' So I moved.

I negotiated one corner and I came face to face with the real valley where my shanty was supposed to be. It wasn't there. The place had been burned down and all I could see were heaps of ashes here and there. There was one large wattle tree which helped most of us know

the direction to our different shanties. My shanty was two metres from the wattle tree which now stood at the centre of the fire's destruction. Over three hundred shanties had been burned down. "Oh no! This can't be true, I can't believe it." I found myself talking aloud to no one in particular. I stood there stranded, not knowing whether to turn back or go ahead to the heaps of ashes. Then my accomplice in the head came again, 'Sonny boy, that's the truth. You have been reduced to zero. You have no home sonny dear and all you have as you stand there is all you have in the world. They have done it again. Remember the elections are near and from next month the campaigns will start. Without places to sleep they have the world to give to you. Yes, they'll promise you better houses, self contained rooms if you elect them to the seat but don't forget with shanties to sleep in, they have nothing else to promise you. Just wait till next month and see. Remember, the one who'll give you the most empty promises, will be the right candidate for the seat. But right now sonny, you must think of yourself. Leave the valley once and for all. Yes, while you stayed here you felt superior because you were better than thousands of others, but where will that get you? Leave Mathare Valley

sonny and try your luck somewhere else. This place has reduced you to zero. Get moving before it's too late. Move away sonny - move! ' Again I followed the instructions of the sadistic accomplice within me.

When I left the valley, my mind was decided. I would never again be mean to myself so as to save for the future. I would save alright but not before I had given myself whatever my heart desired. Right then, I had about three hundred shillings. That was very little considering that it was all I had for meals, accommodation and clothes. But right then, my mind couldn't care about what happened ten minutes later. I was interested in what I would do that minute to satisfy my ego. I had made up my mind to go to town, this time not to Harambee Lodgings, but to normal lodgings where I would be lonely in a room, lie down comfortably after some bottles of beer and then try to see whether there was something wrong I had done to the controller of this universe such that he went to such an extent of punishing me. Maybe if I realized my mistake and probably repented though I didn't know

how I would go about it, we would come to an understanding and he would give me a break. That was the only hope I had right then.

I got back to town at around 8.00 pm. As my life revolved around River Road, I went there and climbed the stairs leading to New Kaka Hotel. I knew there were lodgings here which were of good standards and cheap. Before anything else, I went straight to the counter, shouldered my way a bit to talk to the cashier who was busy serving noisy drunk patrons who had filled up the space around the counter. He couldn't hear me at first so I gave him some more minutes to serve the noisy sons of men: 'What a complicated world this is,' I thought as I waited. 'Here are people laughing and shouting happily, others dancing without a care in the world while hundreds of men, women and children are crying somewhere else without a place to sleep and food. Did all these people really belong to the same person the

preachers talked about? Weren't preachers making one great mistake by thinking that we all belonged to the same person? If this were so, why then should some be weeping with misery while others were weeping with excitement and satisfaction?'

"Hi mister, are there any rooms?*" I asked the cashier when he gave me his attention.

"Yah, plenty. How many do you want?"

A humorous character, I thought and said, "A single room."

Tour name please." He asked as he took out a receipt book.

"Son of Fate," I said. He stopped to look at me.

"A funny name, is that all?"

"Yah, that's all."

"How many days?"

"Three days . . . no just a minute," I said urgently changing my mind.

Why bother about where I'd sleep tomorrow. Who knows whether I'd still be all in one piece. Hadn't I a room, I mean a shanty yesterday and now I didn't.

"Make it for tonight only. I might be in heaven or hell tomorrow." He laughed together with other drunk patrons and gave me a receipt. Room no. 10, forty shillings. I took both the receipt and the keys, put them in my pockets then produced a hundred shillings note. "Three bottles of Tusker premium please," I ordered. When I got the beer, I carried it from the counter to a vacant table near the corner. As I took a seat, a waiter came to help me open the bottle. I started drinking like the other sons of men in the bar, without a care in the world. I was going to make myself as happy as possible. This, I thought would be the only way I would get rid of the negative thoughts and beliefs in me.

I was joined by three people about thirty minutes later who entered and saw the only three empty seats were at the table where I was seated. They took the seats without a word. When they settled, one of them took out a coin and with it hit the top

of the table loudly and ceaselessly, surpassing the collective noise of all the drunk patrons. A waiter heard him call and came. "Exports for these two, Pilsner for me." He shrugged his shoulders like he had brought Mount Everest to the ground, then turned to face his friends. "If this deal goes through," he said, probably continuing with the topic they had as they joined my table, "I am sure each of us will get at least one point five em."

"Oh yes, that should be the least. How much was your share from that German's deal?" the second asked.

"That one was a great deal. You know I am the one who had financed it. It gave me a profit of two and a half million less thirty percent because of ..." I didn't want to listen any more. People talking in terms of millions. I had to leave the table as staying there would only demoralize me. What would they think if someone told them that this guy seated with them taking Tusker Premium had only three hundred shillings in his pockets and that was his entire treasure? I wondered,

but I didn't leave. Before I had gathered enough courage to leave, the men ordered a round for me. As we continued drinking, each one of them included me in his order for beer. I have never felt so out of place in my life.

I just stayed there, silent with my inferiority complex still itching me. What would I say while guys talked about their expected millions, with me here worrying about my burned down shanty.

Then one of them, after making a second order which included me asked, "Yes gentleman, sorry for dismissing you. We've been talking business. What do you do yourself?" A difficult question, I thought. I flashed back a bit into my life. I wondered which part in my life would mean anything to these tycoons. Of course the present was out of question and I wouldn't talk about it. This left me with only one option because still I wouldn't tell them I was a gangster.

"A journalist* I said. That as I expected touched them.

"Could you be the famous Whispers?" Two of them asked almost simultaneously.

"Oh no, I am Nomad," I lied.

"I see. It is sometime since I read that column. But I remember it alright. Where do people get topics to write on? I guess you people blow a hell lot of money from those columns." Money . . . always money. Why do people see everything in form of money, I wondered.

"Tan, they pay quite well." Each asked several questions showing great interest. It was not difficult to answer them because I had all the answers, but I didn't like it. The soft part of me didn't want to tell lies, especially when I remembered that these same guys might meet me next time seated on a very low stool calling for customers. One of them might want his shoe polished and would probably recognize me as the renowned journalist. I decided to bring this to an end, and there was only one way of doing it - leaving. I stood up after some minutes.

"I've got to go gentlemen. I was to meet a character here at 8.30 pm. It's past 10 pm. He must have forgotten or got an accident. I feel I should check with his wife."

"No, Sam, we've just met you and we'd like your company. We can drop you there when we leave. Have another bottle." Why did he call me Sam? That's my brother's name and I failed to see why he should confuse me for my younger brother who was so different from me because he had a bald head. Or could it after all be that this gentleman had an idea of... Then my mind got it. But shit! I called inwardly. You have to have a great memory to be a good liar. Sam was the writer of Nomad which I had just lied I wrote. What an easy way to get a liar! I had to go as staying longer would have ended up in embarrassment to me especially now that we were hitting the bottle and the more you drank the more careless you became and the looser the tongue

A little more argument and I won. I left and locked myself in my room.

As I took off my jacket, I staggered a bit and I had to support myself on the wall. I had drunk more than I intended though I had spent very little. I hadn't bought a single bottle for any of the tycoons. Man, I had no money to compete with tycoons who were talking in terms of millions.

I kicked off my shoes and lay on my bed after emptying my trousers pockets and putting all the contents on the table. This is what I was longing for the whole day; to get a bed and lie facing the ceiling in order to think. However, things were different now. There wasn't much to think about now that the beer I had taken had carried away the greater part of the thoughts. All I felt right then was some unexplainable happiness and satisfaction or some kind of confused contentment. I lit a cigarette and my mind was activated. If only fate treated me this way, I would never complain. Would it after all be that those who drunk daily did it to acquire this kind of self freedom and happiness? Would I be feeling the same if it was chibuku, chang'aa or nyuki I had taken? I doubted it but thought of giving it a try one day.

While still lying there facing the ceiling, a thought struck me. What

would one do to afford this kind of life which needed money? Seeking for an answer, I found myself deep in thought about the future I had sworn never to bother thinking about. 'Son of Fate, this is very easy. It is only that you do not concentrate on thinking about yourself. You are a great man just as you are. Yes you are. Remember you are the chairman of WASP (Welfare Association of Shoe Polishers) and you have about ten thousand shillings at your disposal. All that is required is your signature and the money is in your hands within less than thirty minutes. Sonny boy, wouldn't that pay for all your losses today? Yes, it would and planned well a good business would come out of it and within no time you'd pay WASP back its

money. See how easy it is. Ten thousand shillings in your hands and plenty of businesses open for you?' I jumped out of the bed clapping my hands. Why hadn't I thought about it. I imagined my star shining so brightly and I felt at peace with the world. Someone on the second floor where the bar was, played 'Afro' in the juke box. I started dancing to its rhythm. My problems had come to an end, I thought. I felt the need for more beer. I saw a switch on the wall at the door with a drawing of a bell. I pressed the button. I was to celebrate to the greatest thought in a lifetime.

A young lady knocked at the door and entered two minutes later. "Hello dear, haven't you gone to bed yet?"

"Oh no, would you please get for me a few more beers?" I gave her a hundred shillings note instead of giving the loose cash I had. With about ten thousand shillings lying in a bank waiting for me, I had to act big. "Three bottles of Tusker Premium. What do you take yourself?" I added.

"Tusker . . .?"

"Ok, get yourself two bottles."

"Thanks, I'll be back in a minute." She closed the door behind her. What a beauty, I thought. And where do these bar ladies come from? What makes them what they are and what kind of families do they

come from? Endless questions came to my mind. "Why don't you ask her you curious bastard!" I insulted myself as I lit another cigarette happy that I had found an answer to my future problems.

My order was brought a few minutes later. The maid put the bottles on the table, opened one and before she turned to go put an opener on the table. "You can serve yourself for the time being. We are about to close down for the night. Don't lock the door, I'll be back within the next thirty minutes or so." Although I didn't ask her what the hell for, I wondered why she intended to come back. She had left me an opener and I could see my

change, over forty shillings which she had put on the table. Why then was she intending to come back or had she made the mistake of thinking I would need her for the night? I continued taking my beer and planning about the ten thousand shillings I was sure I would get. Why bother thinking about a prostitute who 'dug' for men as I 'dug' for money?*

If she took thirty minutes only by the time she came back, then I was passing time very comfortably. I hadn't finished the first bottle she had opened for me. When she came back, she didn't have her green dust coat on. She was in what we would call casual clothes. She carried with her six bottles of Tusker Export and a glass. 'Christ . . .' I thought. 'What has got into this girl's mind? Would she be intending to spend the night with me? How wrong she would be.' I decided to stop bothering myself and wait. This is where she worked and maybe she had a room here and probably all she needed now was company -a drinking companion then maybe go to her room. How wrong I was! She opened a bottle for herself and came to sit beside me on the bed. I moved away a bit not wanting our bodies to touch. Thinking that I was giving her more room, she too moved a bit to get nearer to me. That maae my heart start beating faster. I wished she knew how I hated prostitutes.

We took beer in silence for about twenty minutes with me planning how to spend ten thousand shillings. Then I got the surprise of the year. She looked at me straight in the eyes and asked, "Wamathina, do

you know me?* I almost told her that I didn't know any prostitute then somehow some instinct stopped me. I hadn't told her my name and how she got it beat me before anything else. I hadn't given my name to anyone in the bar and after all the girl was too young to have known me when the town 'belonged' to me. I mean when I was a gangster and used to move from one bar to the other, spending money the easy way just like how I got it. She put her hand on my thigh to demand an answer so I answered in a hurry to have the hand removed.

"Is there any reason why I should know you? Anyway, I don't think I do."

"Just look at me properly with some patience, I am sure you will." Again she looked straight into my eyes and this time with a smile. The hand was still on my thigh.

"no need for that, I am sure I haven't seen you." But by then I was already in a panic.

"Maybe my name will help you. I am Mumbi." An odd coincidence, I thought. My mother too was called Mumbi, but what had a name to do with our having met? Mumbi was a common name especially in the location where I was born.

Bored by her topic I answered, "There's nothing which will make me know you young girl. I have heard about and known too many Mumbis. My mother is called Mumbi as well so let's forget about it if you find it difficult to tell me why you think I should know or remember you."

"You are making sense now. Just ask yourself how I knew your name and why the coincidence in our names."

"Whose names?" I asked. I still didn't get what she was driving at.

"Mine and your mother's."

The only reason I could guess was incredible. I couldn't even imagine

it. So I said, "There's no relationship in whatever you are telling me. I mean there's nothing in those names which makes sense to me. Let's forget about the whole thing and talk of other things."

"Oh I see, I am being stupid. It is quite a long time since we met and I was only a kid then. How many brothers do you have?"

"Eight." I answered curtly, annoyed with her nagging.

"I am a daughter of one of them." Oh Qod ! I started shaking. I couldn't believe it. Me! An uncle to a prostitute? It just couldn't be true. Which of my brothers could have brought up this puff-adder?

"Do you have children?"

"Yes, two children.*

"Are they here with you? I mean in Nairobi."

"No, they are with their grandmother."

"When were you home last?"

"To do what?"

"To see your children of course?"

"I only send what I can afford when I can afford." That told me she never sends anything. It was self explanatory. I remembered the children I had seen the day I left gaol. So many and so wretched, no wonder some looked like they would drop dead any minute. Who would take care of her children and they couldn't manage on their own.

I remained silent. My beer became bitter and even the cigarette I had just lit also became bitter. Why. . .why. . .why should this day present such a bad and demoralizing revelation? I hid my face in my arms not wanting to see her face and face the truth. For the first time in my life, I felt tears going down my cheeks. She touched me again, this time on

the shoulder and pushed me a little.

"What's it uncle? Would it have been better for me not to introduce myself to you? What are you getting so worked up about? Don't be so old fashioned. These days there's no uncle or cousin ties. These days it's love. Cousins are marrying, nieces are marrying their uncles, what has surprised you so much?"

"I didn't know our family would produce a prostitute of all things." What else would I have said? But I wished I had only kept silent. The venom that the 'puff-adder" spat was worse than anything I have ever come across in my life.

She took an empty bottle and hurled it across the room. "How dare you call me a prostitute. What are you? Aren't you a robber, a jailbird that has never had time for his own people. Wouldn't you have been even a worse prostitute had you been

born a woman? I didn't know our family would produce a prostitute! One would think it is the family of Joseph and virgin Mary. * She was speaking so loudly that people outside the room were hearing. Some could be heard laughing at our door, just to make us know they were enjoying from without. This made the puff-adder even worse. I struggled to keep my temper down. I would have given her a slap on the face but I guessed if I did that, she would think of hitting back and that would have meant the end of her and jail for me. I just prayed that I'd be able to hold myself. I succeeded with much effort.

After such a great misunderstanding and difference, there was nothing we could talk about. I for one switched off my mind from her. Although this was an extraordinary encounter, I had had much in life. All I worried about every now and then was what would come next. After she had taken four of the Exports she had bought for herself, she stood up and went out. For a sign that she would be back, she left her small purse which she removed from between her breasts. When she closed the door behind herself, a thought to lock from inside got into me. Halfway to the door, I thought of the chaos she would create from outside which would embarrass me even more so I stopped. While she

was still outside, I thought it would be advisable to remove one blanket for I had decided to sleep on the floor. It was past midnight and the day's encounter made me feel so tired. I remembered the pills I had been given by the psychiatrist. I took them out. I knew they were lagatils and phenobarbitones. Both induce sleep which is what I badly needed. I swallowed one of each type with a sip from my beer which I wasn't now taking. She came in just as I curled myself in a corner.

"I would do better than that if I were you. Yes, instead of sleeping in the same room with a prostitute, I would find another room or better still sleep on the verandah." I didn't talk. Why

waste my time talking with a rotten niece. She continued, "One would think you are the founder of Christianity/ she spat •father, uncles, aunts . . .blast you all. Where did I apply for my birth that one would want to have a say on me. I am better off I sell part of myself to earn my bread. What of those who go robbing from others as if they don't have hands to earn an honest living? And one dare talk of prostitutes?"

'This/1 told myself, 'is one dream which will come to an end, only that it is too long.' It was incredible that all this would be true.

I woke up with a start and sat down, nothing had startled me. If anything, it was because I had gone to sleep aware that I was in the same room with a 'puff-adder'. I checked the time and saw it was a few minutes to six o'clock in the morning. I lit a cigarette preparing to get up and go. When my eyes became clear, I saw the light was still on. On the floor, I saw all the clothes my niece had been wearing. Even the inner wears. When I stood up, I saw her stretched on the bed completely nude. She hadn't taken the trouble of covering herself. I got to the bed and covered her with the blanket I had. What a terrible sight! But I had had enough. All I wanted now was to get as far away from this place as possible before she woke up. She had drained all the beer on the table, including my two bottles which I had not touched. The money she had brought as my change was still on the table. It was about forty five shillings. I didn't touch the money. Whatever she was, she was my niece and I would help her where possible. I took my coat and put it on. There was a little over a hundred and fifty shillings in it.

I took out the hundred shillings note and put it together with the money on the table. It was still early to go into the streets but I had to go. I tip toed to the door, unlocked it and went out. I ignored a salute from a night watchman at the verandah downstairs, went ahead and crossed River Road. I looked back as if to make sure I wasn't being

followed by the 'puff-adder. "Qoodbye River Road,* I said loudly though to myself. I promised myself never to rest anywhere near that area lest I met Mumbi again. I had learnt a lesson which I intended not to forget in a hurry, now I'd go to the bank when it opened. 'There's ten thousand shillings waiting for me.' I blessed and congratulated myself for having thought of forming WASP. 'All you need to do after getting the money is to go underground, to surface only when you are ready to pay WASP back its money. Many have become millionaires out of less. Good luck Wamathina and cheer up!' That bastard of a comforter in me made me feel like I was walking in heaven, making me disregard the fact that what I was about to do was embezzlement. A crime which would send me back to gaol. But how else would I have solved the present problems?

The association had close to eleven thousand five hundred shillings in the account, not to make anyone suspicious, I decided to leave some amount. So I withdrew nine thousand, eight hundred and sixty shillings. There was no problem since WASP had trusted me beyond any doubt and I was the only signatory to the account. It was this trust I now took advantage of to embezzle the money. I hated doing it but the problems before me blinded me completely. I didn't care what happened later.

One week later, I had settled on the business I had in mind. After going round the town questioning friends, I had come to the conclusion that selling second hand clothes was the best business followed by selling fruits. I decided to try both at the same time. While I carried on with one personally, I would employ someone to do the other. In Kamukunji, I met a hawker who wanted a partner. He had a very large stand and was doing well. He needed some cash urgently which is why he sought a partner. I bought equal shares with six

thousand shillings. We agreed that we would share the profits every six months. But

money for daily expenses was allowed. It wasn't a bad job. A month after joining him, my partner went home leaving me in charge of the business. He had also given me a key to his bedsitter in Makadara. Life was not bad after all. Within those six months I'd be having over half the WASP money from this business while within the same time my fruits business fetched the rest I thought.

I wished I hadn't touched the money. When my friend came back from home two months later, I had sold over half of the stock. He collected the money I had made, to go and buy more stock. After he went, I never saw him again. One month later, I was kicked out of the house in Makadara by the landlord. I was on the road again, without a place to sleep in.

I left Kamukunji, where I sold the second-hand clothes the day I was kicked out of my friend's house. Although I did not want to speculate very much about that, I had a feeling that this was done by plan. It had occurred to me that the landlord was meeting my friend secretly and I had twice trailed him to chance whether he would lead me to my friend. I think it was for this reason that I had been kicked out. I had therefore taken my bag, (I had bought another bag just like the one that had burned down in Mathare Valley) and left. I was again on the road without a roof over my head. Another friend I had met at Kamukunji came to my rescue. A man he shared a house with had died and he was looking for a person to fill in the space.

He explained, "We've got a nice place in Bahati. The rent is considerably low since it's a hundred shillings per month. No electricity bill, no water bill and you'll move in just as you are. You don't need anything more than you have right now." That was not easy to understand though it looked too good. That evening I had followed my friend to Bahati. It was another funny place. When we got there, the man knocked at a neighbour's door. Before it was fully opened I saw a medium aged fat lady

peep out, then she opened with a smile. You didn't have to step in to know that this room was an off-licence bar for beer and chang'aa. The stench hit your nostrils the moment the door was opened. We didn't enter. One minute later the woman handed a key to my friend and he led me next door. He opened and we entered.

The first and only thing that met your eyes on entering were beds - double deckers. There were four of them and they filled the single room. There was nothing else visible in the room. Then the friend explained, "We stay eight people here. The eighth room-mate died last week and I was given the duty to get a person to fill the vacant bed. We need somebody we can trust and who's ready to follow the rules we have in this room. You will pay an advance of one hundred shillings or more if you feel like. The bed and the beddings belong to the landlord. He stays with us for your information. If you want to buy your own beddings to add, its up to you."

I was introduced to my room-mates that evening. Then I was given the rules, "Visitors can only be brought home during the day. Strictly no visitor of the opposite sex day or night. No smoking after we've gone to bed. You must be at home at the latest 11.00 pm. You should not make a duplicate key. We don't steal, we don't fight, we never quarrel, we trust each other. We help each other whenever need arises." The landlord who was the spokesman then welcomed me with three bottles of beer from next door and I was declared a member of the system after being sworn in. The rules and everything else went along with me very comfortably. But I could not help asking myself the same thing every minute - since when did a city council house have a landlord? This man paid a hundred shillings for the room while he made seven hundred from us. But since the last rule was not to be nosy, I didn't want to violate it by asking the question. What was it to me provided that I had a roof over me

for only a hundred shillings per month? This was far much better than the Harambee Lodgings where I was likely to move to .

Everybody woke up very early to go and bath in the public bathrooms before they became crowded by other workers in the neighbourhood

and school children. Most of my roommates worked in Industrial Area and as such they had to wake up very early because they were to make the seven kilometres on foot. I was always the last to leave the room and I normally left around 6.30 am. After leaving the clothes selling business I had taken charge of the fruits business I had started and entrusted to another man. The business was doing well and the man used to give me a net profit of seventy to eighty shillings daily. He had some two parking boys who helped him to push the wagon full of fruits from one estate to another. When I took over the job personally, I sacked the man and remained with the two boys.

Within three days, I had realised that the man I had so much trusted had been cheating me. I was now making a profit ranging from a hundred to a hundred and fifty shillings. I would wake up early, pick the boys in town around the City Market where they slept in the same wagon and we'd go to buy fresh supplies of oranges, mangoes, ripe bananas, avocados and tomatoes. From the market we would move from estate to estate calling "Jinunulie machungwa, maembe. mapapai, ndizi, nyanya, hata mananzl.' One of the kids or both would whistle and then I repeat the same words. A few months later, everyone in estates knew us and they flocked to buy the items which we sold at a very good price. But at the rate the ground was finishing the soles for my shoes, I had to have it repaired with new soles every two months. However there was one advantage in moving about and pulling the wagon. I was growing physically strong and my muscles became a pleasant thing to look at.

Although I was saving good money monthly, I was not being

mean to myself and my two boys. We ate once a day out of custom but took a great meal. During the day we would take some drinks and some cakes when one felt the need. In the evening, I would give the boys each ten shillings and save ten for each to be given at the end of the month. At the rate I was saving, I felt I would soon pay WASP its money and get rid of the guilty conscience which was biting me. Life was not bad and once again, I started gaining hope. My star would shine without doubt. My boys also gained hope. We were doing very

well. I had got used to pulling the wagon such that out of experience I would run on the main road down a hill at forty-five kilometres per hour. That was when we were going for fresh supplies. My boys would jump on the wagon and sit comfortably when we reached down hill. At that speed, I would overtake a man on a bicycle. When I missed a pedestrian by inches, my boys would whistle, "Anguka na yeye" and clap hands to motivate me to accelerate. When a vehicle missed us by inches, the kids would still whistle and sometimes throw the unwanted fruits to the drivers. That way we overcame our inferiority complex easily.

I pushed the wagon and stopped at Umoja (K) and called out. As usual around this area, housewives and maids came to buy and play about with my funny kids. There wasn't one who didn't admire the kids who dressed like western cowboys. On many occasions we were invited for tea while some housewives and housegirls went as far as bringing us tea when we stopped for long to sell.

This particular day, we had taken tea brought by different customers. We had sold almost two thirds of what we had bought, when we saw two city council askari's coming. We hadn't had trouble from them since we started this business so seeing them didn't make us panic. This time, we were wrong as they were coming for us. We didn't have a licence for this business and I didn't know it mattered. When we were asked for

it and we couldn't produce it we were told to push the wagon towards where a city council vehicle was parked. I pulled the wagon, my two kids pushing it from behind. 'Sonny-boy,' called my invisible accomplice, 'there you are again. Just when you thought you've made it. You know where you are heading for now? If you are not to give up all your savings, you are going in for six months, eight or if luck is not with you, one year - the same old place sonny-boy where you had sworn never to go back alive. That place where all rights have been withdrawn. Yes sonny-boy, that's where you'll certainly go if you don't take prompt action. Qaol, Son of Fate, gaol.' I looked behind to see the position of the cops. They were a few paces behind since they didn't

want to come nearer so that I could not argue with them. I saw my kids were still pushing the wagon .When our eyes met, I thought they had something in them. They seemed to say that we were being fools to let ourselves get arrested by council cops. When I faced forward again, I saw where the city council vehicle was parked - along Outer Ring Road. It was now or never. When I faced backward this time, it was to signal my boys. I timed it very well. There was a line of cars coming heading towards town. If we took off immediately, we would cross the road before the askaris reached it. One of the askaris seemed to sense something was going on. Before he could make up his mind, I told my boys in a hurry, "follow me, hepa," and took off.

I was aware the askaris had taken off as well. I crossed the road while the leading vehicle was about fifty metres away. It hooted like a train when it senses danger. From the comers of my eyes, I saw my boys had made it in time. The askaris had to wait until the last car passed and by then, there would be a distance of over a hundred metres between us. We crossed the rail and entered Buru Buru II.

The sole of my right shoe had gone off as I was crossing the railway. I had stumbled on the rail and had not stopped to see

no

the damage. All I knew was that I was stepping on the ground and tiny stones were hurting my foot. As such our first stop was at a shoe repair shop at the place they call Mausoleum in Buru Buru. I paid ninety shillings for two soles.

The fruit business came to an end that day. It was hurting to part with the kids as they had become part of my life, but I had no option. I had nowhere to take them. I had an idea of looking for a shanty for the three of us but leaving the place where I was paying only a hundred shillings a month was unthinkable. So I did what was best under such circumstances. I told them where they would find me in the evening, at home, telling them to come for help when they were badly pressed. My poor kids. They were bom and brought up in the streets and none of them knew who was the father and wherever their mothers were. They

didn't know whether they were brothers or not. Even worse they didn't know their names. They had therefore given themselves nicknames 'Chali and Mchacho.' Chali meaning a funny character in the streets slang and Mchacho a ruthless cowboy. I gave each of them five hundred shillings. They had earned it alright. I was also ready to give more when they came for help in future. They were my boys. 'When my star shines one day,' I promised myself, 'I will come for you and force your stars to shine my dear boys.' I smiled at the hopeless thought remembering Capone's promise which never materialized. Life is a complicated thing and one never knows when or whether to take it seriously. I was again on the road looking for something to keep me going. I wasn't going to pay WASP with the little I had saved. Later when I was sure of more savings, I could pay. Right now it was only advisable to establish another business. I comforted myself with the thought that days were moving towards the day when my star would shine, assuming that my grandma was not wrong. Could she really have been wrong? How, not with a hundred and thirty five years of experience on this earth.

"Sh ... sh ... sh ... sh ... Wamathina ... Wamathina." I quickened my steps. I had turned a bit to see who was calling. The sight of the secretary of WASP made my heart skip a beat. I continued with my journey, suppressing an urge to break into a run. I knew if this man got me, he would hold me until he got help from the police. I got a feeling WASP members must have reported the embezzlement to the police and now I was most likely a wanted criminal. Three years in gaol was the first thing that hit my mind and I broke into a run eventually.

The secretary ran after me, calling for help, "tluyo! tluyo! tiuyo ... / Simamisha yeye." I didn't care and I just ran on. Every street I turned into had members of WASP. Every member who spotted me followed in pursuit. I went on, blindly and expecting a blow from behind every second that passed. I didn't look back not even once. I could sense a group of people following and others watching from a distance. Looking behind would have given me away so I too pretended to be running after someone who had to be stopped. Then I saw my chance.

A bus had just started off. I decided to jump into it as it gained momentum. I made it just in time. This is a common thing in the city so it didn't look odd to anyone. I got a seat at the rear and for the first time looked where I was coming from. What I saw told me just how lucky I was. It also told me something else, city centre was to be avoided as long as I had the WASP money. I had learnt a lesson I would never forget in my life.

I stayed very alert in the bus. I didn't know where it was going to and I didn't want to ask. I wanted to hear any of the passengers mention his destination. I got it. We were going to Nairobi West so I paid up to West. Luckily, after the burning to ashes of my savings in Mathare Valley, I had learnt a lesson. I had sworn never to leave my savings behind. I had made a small bag, about five inches wide and eight inches long. That's where I put all my savings and then I would use a trick I had learnt in

gaol. I would squeeze the money against my body in the underwear where its warmth would assure me of my savings and its safety.

What was I going to do with myself? I started wondering. It was quite obvious to me now that whatever I touched turned sour. Why did Fate decide to treat me like he didn't have anything to do with my existence on this earth he controlled? Why didn't he give me some rest after all the problems I had had in life. Twice he had sent me to gaol. When I emerged from gaol I became so soft. I didn't want to touch what didn't belong to me. I decided to lead a clean life, earn my bread from my own sweat since the Bible said Qod had cursed Adam's generation. I would save enough to pay WASP which too was caused by the way fate handled me. Or was I after all not meant to live this way? Would there be something I was missing? Was there some knowledge I had that I was not utilizing? Or shouldn't I have left my inheritance? But no! That couldn't be it. I wasn't born a farmer of all things. There must be something else. 'But why push my luck? Why bother about tomorrow? I have enough to push me for months and by then who can tell that something else will not turn up? Time will tell sonny dear . Just relax.' I relaxed .

By the following month, I was selling maize and cassava at the gate of a primary school. I had gone for my bag from Bahati. That was one place I really didn't want to leave. I was sure I would never get such a place again where the rent was so low and where I had a very comfortable bed. But remembering how narrowly I had escaped with my life some months back in town, I could do without the comfort. I had gone to Uhuru building for a bottle of beer one evening and by the time I got back things were different. A WASP member had spotted me. At least that was my guess after what followed. He had followed me to the neighbourhood where I had entered to fill my tummy with

another bottle at the lady's off licence. That was one contribution we gave her for the work she did for us - Keeping our Keys. The following day, she reported to me that some three guys were enquiring about me. She had told them I had gone away but I Knew the guys didn't believe her. With the Knowledge, I took off the same night. I wasn't going to risk three years in gaol because of a good house rent and a comfortable bed. My freedom was the best thing I had in life.

When the school closed in the evening, I would transfer my charcoal burner to another place, near the residential area. Man, the business was not bad. What made it even better is that during my second month, one of my parking boys had met me there and we had rejoined. Chali had been arrested by a mob after snatching a necklace from an Indian lady and had been sent to an approved school. We used to visit him on Sundays and spare some two pounds for him each time we went to see him. But although we told him we were doing well, the truth was that after closing the job for the night, we would spend the night outside. We had made a home in a written off minibus at the gate of an Indian family. We hadn't been very mean to ourselves and we had bought two blankets for each one of us to keep off the cold at night.

"Mchacho boy, life is meaningless, especially when you are no one in the society. But maybe one day, it will have a meaning. When this happens I am sure we will forget all this misery. We are far much better than Chali. At least we have freedom which he doesn't.* That

was how I comforted my young friend.

From listening to his story which I had demanded for, I had thought I was better off than him. Mchacho was about fourteen and within those years, he had spent almost a half of them in approved schools and YCTC. One would think those are educational institutes but I happened to know they were prisons for juveniles. He told me how he found it tough there. He had once

escaped and was later re-arrested with another offence. He had been whipped more than ten times for petty offences within and without the juvenile prison. This had only hardened the minor. Mchacho could drive a knife into the belly of any living thing just as easily as he would do when felling a tree. He had no mercy left in him. Once he had saved Chali's life by stabbing and killing a police dog which had set upon Chali. That same night, he had stabbed a blind beggar who had insulted him. She had called him a stupid bastard because he would not hold her hand to lead her to the place she used to sleep. He had also assaulted the blind woman's daughter who had just arrived and tried to intervene. That was what gaol had done to Mchacho. When I gave him five hundred shillings the day we parted, the first thing he bought was a dagger. He never left it behind and he had it even at this time.

Sitting outside our 'home' we would talk till late hours. In most cases we would let the fire burn up to midnight so that when we got inside we would go straight to sleep. I would lie facing the blue skies especially when there was moonlight. I would look at the million stars which illuminated the sky and find myself wondering which star belonged to me. Every star I saw shone brightly, so I concluded that mine was not among them. Or was mine a black star? Were there black or dark stars? I wondered.

"Hey Amigo, Amigo, Wamathina." I woke up. It was Mchacho calling which wasn't normal. When I sat up, I saw he was scared and was looking in the direction where the Indian family parked their vehicles. A few metres from the gate, I saw a man holding what I recognized as a gun - a pistol. A few metres from him, there were two other men

trying either to open or break into a Peugeot 504 Pick-up. We watched them without talking. Having been a criminal myself, I knew what it meant to try to raise an alarm. Ten minutes later, the door opened and the car was

pushed out of the gate. It was started a few metres away from the home and the bandits drove away.

"What have you seen, Mchacho boy?" I asked him after a sigh of relief.

"Me, seeing? I've seen nothing Amigo. I've been fast asleep. I was a bit sick so I slept a bit early." I smiled. Experience had taught the young boy too which made him a very good companion.

At least it was good the bandits had thought of coming for a car from this place. The following day the Indians approached us and after a lengthy talk, I was employed as a night watchman. There were several vehicles under my care during the night and a salary of four hundred shilling per month. The day I got that job, we went to the shopping centre to celebrate. The following weekend we went to see Chali in prison.

During the day, Mchacho and I would go and roast and sell maize at the school gate. In the evening I would leave Mchacho and go to the Indian's home. We shared our profits equally and I'd give him a hundred shillings from my monthly pay. As time went by, the Indian family pulled me even nearer. At first I liked it because I'd take lunch and super there. But they started leaning on me too much. The mother and other wives in the family would call me and give me odd jobs. At the beginning I would be told to wash the vehicles. Then it went to sweeping, then to grass cutting and eventually I was told to give a hand in washing clothes. I didn't protest although I had so much to do and the salary remained the same. "Toto," the mother called me once. Mchacho was with me then, "Kuja chukua nguo pika pasi haraka. tlapana kaa hapo naongea tu kila dakika. Kama kazi shinda wewe sema toto sisi nachukua mwingine, watu mingi taka kazi kosa."

Mchacho looked at me. I knew what he had in mind. "Say Amigo,

aren't you letting them go a step too far? How can you stand such shit?" It was embarrassing to be told that by a young

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man but that was the truth. I could sense that if it were Mchacho the lady had talked to in that manner, she would have tasted the dagger.

"One day," I told Mchacho out of embarrassment, "I'll give you a story which will surprise you and which you'll find difficult to believe. Let me be pushed about for now." I had never told Mchacho about my past. He didn't even know I was once a gangster and that I had twice been imprisoned. All he knew was that I was just another unfortunate character.

"I'll be glad to hear the story, Amigo. But whatever the case, you are too soft. I think you would be a bishop now if you had joined the church." I smiled, then broke into laughter. I wished the boy would get to know me better so I decided to tell him my story that evening.

"Man," Mchacho called after silently and patiently listening to the story, "you mean you owned a gun? That you held banks and robbed money? Christ and what the hell are we doing here being bullied and pushed about by Indian women if we have such a tough person in you? We can get another gun quiet easily and . . ."

"Oh, my dear, Mchacho just forget about that. Crime does not pay. I spent over ten years in prison for such crimes, three for being in possession of a gun. Son, we had better live the way we are than be somewhere behind bars. Just remind yourself about prison son. If you hated that place, then forget about getting money the easy way. Remember where Chali is now? Can he afford a cup of tea? Can he smoke, go for a movie, or even sleep when he feels like it? Freedom is what we need and we've got it." I could see him getting convinced.

"Toto . . . toto . . . toto ..." I looked at the two Indian kids as they trotted towards where I was seated. I was feeling at peace with the world after a very long time. The kids reached where I was and one

took my hand. "Toto . . . mama naita." I

stood up as the kid struggled to pull me up. I looked at him shaking my head in wonderment. How can fate reduce me to such a level that even kids called me a kid? Was this done purposely to ridicule me or was it from ignorance? The kids probably thought that 'toto' was my real name. It was difficult to tell which was which because either of the two carried equal chances. Anybody employed by an Indian is made to feel inferior especially if he was doing an odd job like the Son of Tate - me.

"Mama anataka ninl. Ramesh?" I asked the elder of the two boys. Tiataka wewe tembea, tembea mbwa halafu rudi." That too had become my duty. The family had bought a dog after the theft of their car. It had become more friendly to me than to anyone else. Mot because I fed it if for any reason, it was because one, we had one thing in common - the master. Secondly, we shared the night experiences with it, while our masters were snoring, buried deep in warm comfortable beds with the assurance that with the watchdog and the watchman going round the house, all was safe.

The claws of the watchdog woke me up as they scratched the body of the pick-up I was in. I lay facing the sky. I had had a terrible dream, where a mob was following me hurling stones, iron bars, pieces of wood, cans and everything else at hand at me, shouting as they did so that I be arrested and taken to jail, where I belonged. As they neared me I gave a scream. So I guessed the dog was coming to my rescue. It had because I woke up. I opened my eyes and the first thing I saw was a very bright star moving at a high speed from one point to another. My heart beats accelerated and I felt storms of warmth in my body. I sat up. Could that be my star? Mas it decided to show up at last? Was my grandma right after all? How could it be that the first thing I see after a terrible dream is a shining star? I was becoming

superstitious alright but I didn't have time to consider that. I looked at the skies again to try and see if I could spot my star again. It was difficult to locate it in the midst of a million others. But all the same, I realised something else which, although I did not want to accept was

the truth; the heavenly bodies I was staring at were moving from one place to the other just like the one I had seen. One would imagine some invisible man with an invisible stick, on an invisible billiard table, playing snooker. But the star I had seen, I argued with myself, was faster and brighter than all the others. Strange as the thought was, I found it amusing. I jumped out of the pick-up and patted the dog's head. I guess that was why we were so friendly. We needed each other in this lonely night world. But there was one thing our masters didn't know. If the robbers came again, they wouldn't find us. I mean me and the watchdog I had named Mahugu, because we knew the rules of the night game - cope or die. We weren't ready for the latter, riot yet. There was still some glitter of hope in our lives.

"Hey Amigo, I must get back to town immediately." Mchacho told me with what I noted was much excitement. Me had just arrived from town from the City Market where he had gone for more maize and cassava. After putting the load down, he continued, "I've heard word that Chali was spotted in the streets the day before yesterday. He's looking for me everywhere."

"You shouldn't take that seriously, Mchacho," I answered not very sure of myself. It was incredible. From what he had told us the last time we visited him in Kakamega where he was imprisoned, he had about one more year to go. What could have happened?

"I know what I am talking about man and again I happen to know Chali far much more than you think you do. If my pals tell me Chali is in town he jolly well is. No one who knows me well can dare tell me a lie for your information, and my pals know me

just too well. Chali is in town and looking for me. With me looking for him, it will be easier for the two of us."

"What do you think happened?" I asked curiously. I was interested and from what Mchacho had talked, I was convinced Chali could be out.

"Well, there can't be two things to this. He has broken out of jail. However the last time we saw him, he told me in the juvenile prison

jargon that they had the intentions. He has made it. It won't take the two of us more than six hours to get in touch. We will be with you this afternoon." For an answer, I dipped into my hip pocket and fetched out a small wallet I had bought to be putting money for expenses. From it I fetched two hundred and Fifty shillings and gave Mchacho.

"See if he needs some clothes, maybe a pair of shoes or anything else. He may even need some pocket money though that can be taken care of later. Please take care of yourselves."

Mchacho took the money, looked at me with what seemed to me like amazement and then said, "Man, you know you are great? I think you are too good to be anything but a cardinal. I sometimes Find it hard to believe you were ever a gangster. Chali won't believe it either, yet it is the truth. You know man, there is a saying in the streets that, if you see a man who gets to be trusted by an Indian, there's something very wrong with him. Say like, he could be a fool or very ignorant. You are neither of the two yet these Indians trust and push you about and you allow it. Maybe one day, when you have trusted me enough, you'll know I can be very useful. I have always guessed there's something you are after and that's why your hope in life never withers. I am sure your patience will win us a jack-pot and now that I have got the courage to face you, let me tell you that where you need to get rid of an eye witness, just send me. Maybe now that Chali has come, it is even better. I know this maize selling is a shake-off but it will do for the time being. Amigo, just know I am for the plan Whatever type of a plan, I am for it and wholly behind you."

That was surprising. In whatever I was doing, I was intending to try and reform these kids I had met and liked. But I now realised it was a waste of much effort. The kids were destroyed beyond reform. Mchacho couldn't even believe I was just pushing life the way fate presented it. He believed that you didn't allow Indians to push you about without something behind it.

We parted as Mchacho went to look for his accomplice and I went to my 'office'. There was a lot to be done on this day. The office was very busy because it was full of extra work. One of the Indian's daughter

was getting married. There were several vehicles outside the home and they were to be thoroughly washed with soap, rubbing powder and car wax then be decorated. All this work was supposed to be done by three people. The two drivers who drove the two pick-ups and me. That same morning, one of the drivers had received an urgent call and had left. So there was only the two of us to wash two pick-ups, two station wagons and three saloon cars and they were to be ready by ten o'clock. We got busy working wishing all the time Mchacho and Chali would turn up to give us a hand.

We had cleared three cars when there arrived a Volvo 245 QL. The driver stopped, got out and went toward where the others were seated enjoying the work we were doing. The elder son in the family got up to meet his friend. They shook hands and the son left the visitor to join the others while he came to where we were busy working. He addressed me, "Toto hii kazi nyinyi maliza mwaka gani? nyinyi fanya kazi pole pole Kama watoto nanyonya. Kama maliza hii chukua He nakuja saa hii kwanza. sikia?" I just looked at him. I had never felt so annoyed. I dropped the hose pipe down. The whole of my body was trembling without control. I just managed to control an urge to give him a punch on that mouth. He sensed it and moved away a bit. The others too had heard the man's approach and had witnessed everything, including my temper. The driver came

and removed the hose pipe, closed the water and took the car away. Absent minded, I went to the Volvo that had just arrived and I got in. I stepped on the clutch, moved the gear to neutral, ignited the car then engaged the reverse gear. I could sense all the eyes on me. Children, wives, husbands and the father. I reversed the car to the gate then engaged gear number one and like a rally driver would, I let it jerk forward towards where we were working, where the hose pipe was. I stepped on the brake pedal, engaged a neutral gear, engaged handbrake, put off the engine and got out. All this I did in a matter of seconds. I was aware of the tense atmosphere I had created. I could see everyone, except the visitor, was surprised. The reason was quite obvious - they did not know that I could drive.

As I took the packet of Omo to start working on the car, from the corners of my eyes, I saw the old man coming. He was the head of this large family and I guess age had softened him up. He was the only person who talked to his employees with some respect. He approached me and when I looked up and saw he was smiling, I looked away. It took me sometime to lose my temper and when it did, it took time to control it. I was still furious. I just stood where I was while he talked, minus my temper.

"Look, son," he addressed me, "when a kid of your age talks to you, whether he talks dirty or not, you don't have to get annoyed. He's your age-mate. Just cheer up and know he is not serious. I have seen you are a good driver. I didn't know you could drive. I think I'll give you a better job. Son, just cheer up and forget about a kid who is of your age and ..."

"Look here, old man," I retorted and wished he would leave me alone, "if somebody has nothing to say he had better shut up till he gets something to talk about. I've never worked so hard in my life and while this is so, the first thing, this fool decides to do is say that we are working like kids. He is very lucky I didn't give him a blow and he had better stay warned about that."

"Son, just forget that. You are a man and you must get difficulties here and there. Mow, have you got a licence? Everybody here is surprised to see that you can drive and you know everybody here likes you. I promise you a better job son. Just finish up what you are doing today and let's wait for tomorrow/ Seeing that I wasn't going to talk anymore, he left me as I took the hose pipe and started working. The son came closer to apologize.

I blasted him as he started. His father called him and with a shrug he went away. The driver tried to start some talk which didn't succeed. I had had enough of being pushed about. I wasn't going to let that happen to me again in my life. That incident had changed my life. I had also realised why fate had decided to deal with me mercilessly. I wasn't practising all I knew. Why hadn't I seen this before? I removed the Volvo and brought a Nissan Sunny.

I didn't have a driving licence. I hadn't even booked for a driving test in my life, neither attended a driving course. But I was a good driver, Before they sent me to gaol the first time, I had all the vehicles at my disposal. I had a key which could pick any car I was in need of and my instructor had all the time in the world to give me lessons. You had to be a good driver to qualify to be a gang's get-away driver and that is what I was years back. But when I emerged the second time from gaol, problems and troubles had welcomed me, reducing me to almost nothing such that I forgot the things I knew. All the time I was going up and down seeking for some job to keep me going I had forgotten I could drive and that the course would earn me a better living than anything else I would attempt. Inferiority complex had made me feel I was something below human, blocking all the light from reaching my eyes. And now, just a small incident reminds me of my abilities. That I am as good as anyone else and probably better, and that my services would be bought more

clearly than I had been allowing. Was this the flaw I was making all along? Was it why my star had not shone? Whatever the case, I had been resurrected and self confidence started to permeate in me.

The father of the family whom all employees had nicknamed Rajiv called me two days later after the wedding. On the wedding day, the son I had quarrelled with had twice called me and sent me out with one of the pick-ups. I had driven to town and brought home food from a supermarket. I had not told him I didn't have a driving licence the reason being that he hadn't asked and he was at the same time trying to be friendly. After a good number of years I enjoyed driving once again.

"Son," Rajiv addressed me when I went to see him, • I remember a couple of days ago I promised you a better job. Mow tell me, is your licence valid?"

"I am sorry I do not have one. I lost it some years back. I didn't know what ..."

"Okay never mind that," he interrupted. "I'll send you to my driving

school for a test, table test, then if you are good with that and the traffic signs, I'll organize for another driving licence for you." He asked for my ID card which he kept till he called me two days later.

The test was chicken feed to me. If there were things I really knew well, one of them was driving. There wasn't a single road sign I didn't know. So needless to say, I passed very well in the eyes of my examiner. Rajiv, after asking me for three of my photographs provided me with a new driving licence a week later. At first I had taken him as the most generous and kindest person I had met after seeing how urgently he had worked on the issue. Then I had realised the reason accompanying the kindness. The driver who had allegedly been called home was not coming back and Rajiv needed another driver badly. The truth was that the driver had not been called home but had found a

better place and a better employer and had therefore quit Rajiv's enterprises. It was this vacancy that Rajiv wanted me to fill with a raise of only four hundred shillings. I was to get eight hundred shillings per month and still I would be on the look out for possible robbers at night. The old timer was killing two birds with one stone which most people are fond of saying is impossible - Rajiv was doing it. He had found a good fool in me.

On getting the job, I moved from the written off car where I shared with my young friend Mchacho. I was given one of the garages to make a home. He hadn't been kind enough to give me one of the servant quarters. Those were reserved for sacks of charcoal, logs for fire and disposed tyres. Mine was to be the garage and worse still one whose gate could not get closed because it had been hit by one of his careless sons while he was parking one of the cars. It was okay with me.

With what I had saved, I bought a safari bed and a mattress. I also added a blanket to the ones I and Mchacho had and two bed sheets. I also decided to buy myself a few more clothes now that I was on my way up in life. I didn't need anything else because I ate in a nearby kiosk. I could afford it now.

It was a good change after all I had faced since emerging from gaol. I didn't mind being pushed about here and there. It would be unthinkable to expect an Indian not to do that, not to give you odd jobs which you hadn't agreed on upon employment. As time passed by and with the self confidence reborn in me, I knew I would find a better place just like the former driver, or better still Rajiv would at least think of making me an equal with the other driver, thus giving me another raise of six hundred shillings. That was the dream I had right then and which kept me cool, tolerant and patient.

After the Mathare Valley incident I decided to change my style of savings. I still had the WASP money in my mind all that time and I was ready to save and pay it back. Every time I went to town

I was reminded of the narrow escape from a harambee beating. There's nothing more fearful than mob justice because it always resulted in death either instantly, or days, weeks or months later. But I was a bit safe because I was always in a vehicle and most of my work was based in Industrial Area and the outskirts of the town. Now that I was a better person, my saving style had to go up. So I spared myself some few hours to go and open an account with the post office. I had some three thousand shillings which was to start the account and I'd save half of my earnings monthly.

I parked the pick-up Peugeot 504 outside the General Post Office on Kenyatta Avenue where I wanted to open the account. I had just found a vacant parking space and was about to switch off the engine when I was attracted to a drama some few yards away. I had glimpse of it through the driving mirror. I looked out of the window to see more clearly. My heart beat could be heard clearly by my ears. Then I saw them clearly- Mchacho and Chali. A group of people were running after Chali and, Mchacho was fighting dangerously trying to stop the mob from reaching Chali. By reflex, I reversed the car out of the parking, engaged gear number one and drove towards the scene of the drama. On reaching there, I opened the off door then through my side window started calling, "Chali . . . Chali . . .! Mchacho . . .! Mchacho . . . here!! Here," I continued calling. Chali had broken into a run. 'Christ,

they'll take the boy back to prison,' I thought with pity and called louder, "Chali, Chali ..."

He heard me and looked. Me was now a few paces away. I saw him turn to where his accomplice was and called, "Mchacho! Come, Cardinari is here."

'Who was Cardinari?' I wondered but didn't have time to bother about that. The immediate problem was to rescue my two friends disregarding the repercussions. Mchacho heard Chali call the third time and he took off, towards Chali. Me was

turning and fighting, his dagger in hand. When they realized my intention they jumped into the car, Chali sitting beside me. I took off, leaving the angry crowd vomiting venom. I didn't care if they took the registration number or not. I was saving two lives in doing what I did. I dodged my way in the streets and eventually got to Uhuru Highway. I thought I saw a car following us but when I left Uhuru Highway and plunged into Ngong Road, the car was not behind us. It was at this juncture that I gave my young boys some attention. I could hear they were talking as I drove away from their possible death but I couldn't get what they were talking about. It was then that I was surprised when I looked and saw Mchacho's knife had blood. He had made use of it alright.

"Can you put that knife away?" I ordered, as an answer to a question he had asked me and which I hadn't got. He put the knife away into one of the boots he was wearing. "Who is Cardinari?" I asked facing Chali who had called the name during the drama.

"That's the name we've given you. You know you are a great guy to us, we mean it. . ."

"Look here young men, you should stop giving me nicknames, right, if you've forgotten my name I'll remind you but take care so that I don't do it the rough way." I sounded angry though I wasn't. I was just trying to conceal the happiness and joy of meeting my kids again after four months. I was happy too that I had met them in a position I had all

reasons to be proud of.

"Hey Amigo, looks like you've become solid after all. You sound tough and I guess that's your true colour. Man it looks like you've got the Indians in your pocket. I remember this car. Or you blew the racket in our absence and got the Indians to give you this machine?" I couldn't help laughing. The boy still thought there was something behind my hanging around the Indians, runny still, the kids didn't talk of or thank me for saving their lives. It was as if they had asked me to wait for them there in a car.

"Why didn't you come back as promised. You know I was worried and had decided to go looking for you in every police station?"

"Man," Chali said, "we couldn't come back to you without a thing. I mean we agreed we must buy you a present. We swore we would bring you a pair of shoes and a shirt and we wanted them to be expensive. And that's what we've just done."

"What?" I asked.

"We've just snatched a fat purse." Chali took out a pouch which he unzipped to expose a bundle of dollars - American dollars. I looked away with a smile and to be frank, great joy. I didn't need the money, the pair of shoe or the shirt they were promising, but my boys needed the money and it was joyous to see they had it and they were safe.

"Would you have got away really? That was too close." I asked after a short silence.

"There was nothing there. We had no doubt about that although you made it easier and very safe." It seemed incredible alright but I didn't have enough reason to doubt the kids. They were bom and grew up in the streets and they knew their game best just as I did mine when I was a gangster. But still I warned the kids.

"You know, I don't doubt that but remember it is that confidence which eventually finds one's way to prison. If people didn't have that

confidence they wouldn't attempt risky things which means they wouldn't go to prison. Just think about that and you will see how true it is."

They nodded with agreement after a minute's thought. Then they argued, "But you see man, we must live and we must take risks to make the living worth it. We can't starve to death while when we pass through places like Mew Stanley Hotel we find men seated outside burning money while smoking and drowning money with beer while we haven't touched food for days. And

when you ask them to help you some don't even bother looking at you while the most generous pushes twenty cents on the table towards you. He doesn't even want your hands to touch his. It's like you have leprosy. What the hell can twenty cents do even if twenty people gave you that amount each? Man, you think everybody is like you? We've lived all these years with these people and we know how mean they are.* It wasn't a bad argument as far as I was concerned.

The kids then gave me another funny and interesting story which was probably brought about by the argument. It was the same Chali who told it. "Juzi tu buda mwingine alikuja akapark Benzi hapo New Stanley. Tukakuta anacholea kesi na paiya City Council. Akajaribu kuichotea ikakataa. Ikamcholea karatasi na ikahepa. tiuyo Buda alinoki mazee. Mdipo nikamuapproach nikamwambia "Tuchotee tukaibe hicho kitabu tukidestroy." Buda hakujua tuta act kivipi. Basi tukamwachia chali mwingine hapo tukamgutua huyo Buda amechotea huyo chali tukifaulu kukipora kitabu hicho. Si ndio tukamfuata yule pai. Mchacho akaendaakakikubakilekisomething, akanitupia nikalaza. tiuyo pai akanifuata huko akishout. nilichukua kona tatu tu nikampoteza. tiuyo buda alituchotea sow tatu ..."

I laughed until we got home. Pai in the street jargon is a cop. Buda is a tycoon. But what was so funny was the way the unlearned kid mixed English and Swahili. What the boy meant was simple; they met a tycoon who had been given a ticket by a City Council attendant and they asked him to pay them so that they could destroy the ticket. The tycoon did not believe them but they managed to get it and he paid

them three hundred shillings.

We got home, my garage home, at around 1.15 pm. I had some forty five minutes to rest before I went back on duty. I led my teenagers into the garage which was almost empty. There was only my bed and the bag which hang on the wall.

"Amigo," Mchacho called while standing at the centre of the room with his hands akimbo, "these buggers don't take you very seriously. Why the garage and not one of those beautiful apartments. Aren't they empty? A driver who is . . ."

"Just a minute, Mchacho," I interrupted before he managed to create more hatred between me and my employers. "Just stand outside there and see a written off car and probably you'll change you mind." Then I turned to Chali and said, "Chali, had this cowboy given you the story of how we've been fairing? If he didn't exaggerate then you are sure we've had a tough time and now hear what he's talking about. Ever seen such an improvement in such a short time?"

"Honestly, it is quite an improvement. I can't remember when I last slept on a bed myself. In fact I slept on one when I was admitted into the prison hospital. That's the only bed I've slept on in my life. If Mchacho here would be frank enough, he'd surprise you by telling you he has never slept on a bed in his life." It was the truth, from what I had gathered about their lives and the stories they had given me, there was no mention of a bed or anywhere they slept in comfort. But even with this knowledge I still found that incredible. What a life!

"Chali," I called to continue, "what is needed on this earth is patience and tolerance plus a great amount of hope. Don't let anyone convince you otherwise. Without those three things you are a wretched man."

"What about self confidence? Can you have hope without that?" Mchacho intervened.

"It depends on what kind of confidence son. If you become confident that you'll bring Hilton Hotel to the ground by just digging that dagger

of yours into it, what results will you get? Self confidence comes dragging hope behind. Come on Mchacho, sit on a bed for the first time in your life and probably that will convince you that I am speaking facts only." It wasn't much of a bed though.

"Man, it isn't a bad idea after all. We can hole-up here for sometime. Any objections Cardinari?"

"Wamathina." I corrected Chali then said, "That's why I brought you here. We must agree on various things. One of them being that you'll stop loitering and driving knives into people bellies and of course find something better to do. Is that clear cowboy? One of these days you'll have that same knife driven into your belly by a guy who knows how to look after himself."

Mchacho couldn't believe it. Instead he whistled softly and said, "Amigo, you must be dreaming. That man isn't bom and probably I'll be dead by the time he's bom. Man you shouldn't believe those Chinese films very much." I decided to cast his doubts out. I knew I would do it myself but since I did not want to underrate his self-confidence I decided to fetch a stick the size of his dagger. When I got it I called him.

"Here, Mchacho, come." I gave him the stick which he took and seemed not to understand what I wanted. I told him. "Here is a man who can use your own dagger on you." I was pointing at myself. He stood up.

"And' why don't I use the dagger itself, why the stick?" he asked with a smile which told me he still would prefer the stick.

"Oh yah, you can use the dagger. I just thought you'd hesitate because I am your friend. Just come upwith the dagger. It is the same one I'll drive into you." Chali laughed probably detecting uncertainty on both sides. Mchacho prepared himself with the stick. As he did so, the words of my instructor came into my mind. 'Don't panic, just stare straight into his eyes and read his mind.' When Mchacho attacked aiming his 'knife' at my chest, I formed an X with my hands and then

turned my right hand to get hold of his wrist, twisted his whole arm bringing him to the floor with the 'knife' now pressing on his back. I can't remember what my instructor had called that style but I remember I had practised it over fifty times. Chali was still jumping up and down

clapping his hands by the time I released Mchacho and helped him up.

"Do you want to try it again, this time with the dagger?"

"Amigo, I am glad I didn't opt to use the dagger. I mean, the way you pressed that piece of stick onto my back told me you weren't kidding. But man, it looks like there isn't a thing you don't know. I must have been crazy to call you a soft guy. I've never been thrown like that in my life."

"I too haven't seen that outside the movies. It looks like this Chinese thing is not fake after all." Chali interjected and I smiled with confidence. I was gaining good ground in trying to reform the hardened kids.

"Now my boys," I called. "I am about to go back on duty. You stay here. If anybody asks you, you are twin brothers and your father is my brother. Understand? I'll come with two more beds on my way home. Tomorrow is Saturday, I'll take an off duty and we can go to buy some more clothes for you. You shouldn't always wear jeans and T-shirts like they are the only clothes we have in the shops."

"Man, bring that purse. This guy here can tell us whether that money has any meaning. Look's to me like we were taking a risk for nothing."

That told me the kids though experienced hadn't come across dollars. From what I had seen the first time Chali unzipped the pouch, there was likely to be some very good money. But I had no intention of letting them know the truth. I had a feeling it would be spoiling them all the more.

There was a total of three hundred and seventy US dollars and one

thousand seven hundred Kenyan shillings. I knew of several places where I would get twenty eight shillings for one dollar so I calculated immediately and found there was about ten thousand Kenya shillings. I took the money and put it in my coat's inner pocket.

I just gave them a hint "This is thrice as much as what you've got in Kenyan currency if not more, I'll see what I can do." I left fifteen minutes later after agreeing on various things.

It cost me one thousand Five, hundred and fifty shillings to purchase two safari beds, four blankets, two pillows and four coloured bed sheets. I had bought them from one of Rajiv's family shop so they didn't mind me using the pick-up on my way home after duty. They did not object to the boys staying with me for they already knew Mchacho who at times they had instructed to clean the vehicle. Without Chali, Mchacho behaved more gently.

I found the boys at home and they helped me to unload the items. I had used the money I was going to open an account with. I hadn't got time to exchange the dollars and I knew I'd pay myself back the money. After arranging the house and making the beds, I took my friends out for supper. Back at home, I gave them one thousand five hundred shillings which they shared between themselves. I told them I had got my share which of course they didn't believe. For the first time in his life Mchacho slept on a bed and for the second time, Chali as well enjoyed the comfort of a bed in a free world. Well, what else was there to do but to start living under these circumstances. For the first time, I thought the world was moving in the right direction.

This happiness didn't last for even two months. My friends didn't want to reopen the maize-cassava selling business. The business paid well but they wouldn't entertain the idea of hanging on one point burning their fingers roasting maize and cassava. During the day, the kids were never at home. I would get home to find they've gone out. They'd come later in the evening but they were always punctual. Towards the end of the second month, Rajiv called me.

"Tell me frankly son, who are these boys you stay with?" I was taken by

surprise. Why should he ask after such a long time. Why

not when I arrived with them or immediately after? However I didn't hesitate answering.

"They are my brother's sons."

"Why aren't they in school?"

"He can't afford to pay the school fees for them. He's a poor man."

"I doubt if there's anyone who can believe that. Can't afford the school fees but can afford to buy very expensive clothes and shoes. Now look son, everyone in the neighbourhood is complaining about various things. Their cars have lost head lamps, indicators, driving mirrors and such like items since these kids showed up. I do not want to support the suspicions but I want you to be on the look out. You are a good man son and everybody here knows it, so take care you don't get yourself involved with hoodlums without your knowledge. Please try to investigate this and you'll tell me." I agreed I would investigate though I doubted that possibility. The kids had to leave at night to go and do the stealing and I wasn't a heavy sleeper. I would no doubt hear. But I was wrong. I wasn't a heavy sleeper sometimes back but now I was. The comfort and contentment I achieved had changed me.

I didn't investigate, neither did I take Rajiv's warning seriously. This almost cost me my life, five days from then, Mchacho and Chali assaulted an Indian school girl on her way from school. When passers-by intervened, the boys had taken off after snatching a tiny electronic watch from the girl. They had taken her school bag too. Now it was quite clear they were the persons who had disturbed the peace in the neighbourhood. The police were called in and were directed to our home.

I got home at around 6.35 pm. Just as I entered the gate, I saw a police 999 car parked in the compound. I had no reasons to fear because as far as I was concerned, I was a very clean person with an honest living. I got out of the car, locked it and

was heading for the main house where I handed over the keys. Someone called me. I turned and saw a police officer outside my 'garage home.' One of Rajiv's sons had pointed me out to the officers. When I got there, I almost got a shock when I saw the things which were allegedly recovered from my house and worse still from a box which I had borrowed from one of the other garages. I had turned the tool box into a suitcase. Among the items, were two motor vehicle radio cassettes, four head lamps, two driving mirrors and a few other things. There were also screw drivers of different sizes which of course were used to break into cars and unscrew the lamps and worst of all two daggers. Chali must have had a dagger too which he kept hidden from me. With my criminal record, I knew there was no way I could get away with it. 'Handling stolen property,' I thought of seven years imprisonment - the minimum sentence.

■ Wewe ndiwe mwenye hapa?" That was the first question the cop asked me when I got to him. The garage door was wide open and I could see three other cops busy carrying out a tooth brush search. They were now tearing the mattress. Luckily my bag was not there. I had taken the clothes to my local dry cleaner.

"Ndiyo. hapa ni kwangu."

Tia unajua hii mali?" he asked indicating the recovered items. Honestly I didn't know and I was even more surprised than he was to learn that those things were found there.

"Honestly I do not."

He threw an open blow at me which I blocked by reflex. He tried another one which I blocked too. it wasn't an easy thing to reach any part of my body if I was looking at you. When the rest saw how I was blocking the blows, they left the search to join him. I set myself, ready to fight. The number of people confronting me never worried me in my life. My instructor had told me that the more the number the easier the defence. A second cop tried to give me one blow which I blocked and instead gave him one. A third cop joined in, a one foot club in hand. He tried it on me.

I hit it out of his hand and it went high in the air. Then the first cop got me on the side. I turned and gave him one blow which sent him to the floor. A gun appeared in the scene as the fourth cop called, "Put your hands up and freeze." You never argue with a gun in sight so I froze. The next minute the cowards were all on me using their boots, blows and coshes. For only two minutes it seemed like hell had broken loose and the world had come to an end.

"Stop it!" A sergeant ordered, "Handcuff him and continue with the search I" I was handcuffed and ordered to squat outside my garage home. The sergeant stayed with me as the others continued with the search.

I couldn't think of a way out of this problem. I could see Rajiv talking to a police inspector some distance away outside the entrance of the main house, but whatever they were talking about, I was sure it wasn't to rescue me. I knew how cowardly Indians were especially where the police were involved. What he was most likely doing was promising him total co-operation and probably even a colour television set from his shop so as not to involve him (Rajiv) in this thing. I was surely going back to prison for trying to reform young boys whom I believed had been led by poverty to become beasts. I was sure I would do it but on the contrary I was going to draw a seven year stretch in prison. What a pity? I looked at the handcuffs around my wrists and almost wept. Every other time they put handcuffs on me, I drew a prison sentence. Prison! A third time.

"Who are the owners of these two other beds?" the sergeant asked me

"My nephews."

"Where are they?"

"They went home to see their father ."

"I see, you think you are tough. Just wait till we get to the station. You'll sing. Make no mistake about that. You'll produce

those kids and you'll give us a good story how you operate with them. And that reminds me, you are the driver of that pick-up?*

"Yes," I answered. He was thinking of what I was fearing most. My rescue of the boys in town. I was sure it must have been reported.

He said, "Oh yah, I get it now. It's you and the same kids in town the other day. You robbed a foreigner of approximately ten thousand shillings and you used this car. You have much to tell us. If I were you, I'd start talking right away. I wish you'd take me seriously. I have seen tough guys talk and I have seen what happens to those who try to be hard. Have you ever been arrested for any crime?"

"Mo sir, I am not a criminal." I wasn't going to make it easy for him. But eventually I knew they would find out and after that, trouble would fall on me. They would no doubt involve me in the case of the foreigner's robbery. There was no doubt about that. It might not stick and I might even win the case because I have some know-how but then I would be in for handling stolen property and there was no way of arguing such a case. 'Oh, my! How wrong my grandma was.' I thought. I touched the talisman she had given me and funny enough it gave me some comfort to think of it and my grandmother. The radio in the 999 patrol car some metres away started calling. The sergeant looked at me once and thought I was safe. He went to answer the radio call.

'Son of Fate this is a seven year stretch staring at you in the eye. Remember what you swore after the last prison sentence? That you had better absorb lead than go back to gaol. The sergeant has given you a break. Just observe from the corners of your eyes and see how busy the others are. Yes, Wamathina, that's it. Sonny boy take off towards the back of the main house. Qet on top of your friend's (Mahugu's) kennel, reach the wall with your arms, heave yourself up and drop on the other side. Don't waste time, move! Sonny boy move!' I moved.

No one saw me even by the time I got to the back of the main building. I reached the dog's kennel and realised it was not so easy to get onto its top. Then I saw a seven year old kid struggling to take a dining

chair into the house through the back door. I got to him, pushed the kid down and took the chair, stepped on it and got on top of my friend's kennel. The kid was now screaming with fright. I saw some lady come to his rescue. She spotted me and screamed. By then, my handcuffed arms were on the wall. I heaved myself. Just as I was getting ready to jump, I heard a gun shot. It hit between my legs splashing bits of sand all over. I jumped just as the second bullet echoed. I had made it. It would take them five good minutes to go round the wall and the blocks neighbouring Rajiv's home. By then, I was sure I would be hundreds of steps ahead of them.

Thank heavens for the practice I had had when I was pushing a wagon down hill with my hands in front. That was how I was moving right now running away from a seven years' imprisonment. On dropping to the ground, I realised there were so many ways I could follow. That was to my advantage. Before they realised the one I had taken and think of calling in a police dog I would be a kilometre away.

My old instincts of a hunted man came to life. There was one trick which always kept me a step ahead. That was, thinking and doing the opposite. Here I saw the easiest way which anyone would think of taking. It was the same one the police would guess I would take so I opted to take the worst of all - the most risky and which not many would dare take. It would not cross their minds that anyone in his right mind would take such a choice. It saved me. Following the same trick, I found my way to town which of course they wouldn't think I would attempt knowing that I was handcuffed and everybody I met would see the handcuffs and probably raise an alarm.

I took out a handkerchief and used it to conceal the cuffs.

Each time I met a person I pretended to adjust my waist belt turning the other way and he would pass. After all, I had long realized that people were often engaged in their own problems and had almost no time at all to mind about other people's problems. As for the handcuffs, that didn't worry me. There isn't a pair that has been introduced which could not be unlocked traditionally.

I Knew where I'd get experienced people to do the job and that is where I was heading to. It was getting to past seven and darkness had set in. All I needed was to avoid brightly lit streets as I headed for Bus Station where most jail birds met. I couldn't miss one I had met in gaol and these boys could open any handcuff in existence. I got there at around 7.30 pm.

I was about to take a seat when I heard from behind. "Yes Wamatroubles, niaje?" I turned and saw an old friend of mine. A former QSU officer who had become a gangster. He had served fifteen years for robbery with violence and had recently got out.

I said "noma sana wakwetu. Mlikuwa nimevaliwa dakika zingine nikagura." We were talking in this jargon incase some uninvited person heard. I exposed my hands for him to see, which almost gave him a shock.

"Lo! kumbe ni kinaa hivyo? Ni nguri kweli kweli." By then he already knew what I wanted and why I had gone to that place. The cuffs were the self-adjusting type and they had tightened as I ran. They had pressed me badly. A pin or a needle is all that was required, rive minutes later, Muriuki gave me the handcuffs. I took them, put them in my coat pocket and headed for the public toilet. I dumped them there and got out. I had some money on me since I hadn't opened the account. I gave Muriuki two hundred shillings. He escorted me to Terrace Hotel from where I took a taxi. It wasn't late, but I wanted to get out of town in a hurry. What wouldn't I have given out to get away from seven years imprisonment.

"Eastleigh." I told the taxi driver even before I closed the door. I was in a hurry.

"Sixty shillings," he said.

"Take off, its a deal." He took off. I told him to stop at the gate of St. Theresas church. I didn't want him to know where I was going, whether in the church or Mathare Valley. I knew most taxi drivers were informers and I did not know which one to trust. Outside the gate

after paying, the driver took off and after he had gone, for the second time I thought of seeing Father Qrol. This time to ask him to pray for me because it now seemed to me like the beginning of my end had come. I decided against it thinking that prayers wouldn't help or change anything in one's life. I went ahead and came to Mandamano bar. I entered.

"Room please, single room." I told Mwangi.

"Fifty shillings."

I produced the fifty shillings. When I got the key, I moved to a vacant table and ordered for Tusker Premium. "The end of the road again," I said in a soft voice to no one in particular. "Mow what next? Where do I get another job. For how long is fate going to deal with me? What can I do to make fate know that I intend to be a good man, to earn an honest living? I bothered myself with endless questions which couldn't get answered. What surprised me was that, despite the fact that I had got the misfortune because of Chali and Mchacho, I still wished to meet them again.

'Son of Fate, stop bothering yourself with hopeless questions. For how long are you going to promise yourself this same thing? That you'll live each day as it comes. Wamathina, forget about tomorrow. Mow order for yourself a good supper, take a few beers and go to bed, rest and relax till tomorrow.'

'Mo!' I said to my accomplice for the first time. 'I won't do that. I'll do what I have never done since I left gaol. I'll find a good lady, buy her beers and then go with her to my room. Yes, that's

what I'll do'. My eyes were already on one who was seated alone taking some soda. I signaled to her and she came immediately. It was as if she was waiting for the signal.

"Have a seat" I told her. Immediately my accomplice came back.

'Son of fate, you are now heading to the cemetery. You have survived

that long because you have avoided what you are just about to do. You won't do it Wamathina, you won't. Those two things are the enemies of development - beer and woman. Yes sonny boy, the moment you attempt that you are sunk. Stop it! Sonny boy stop!' I had just told the lady to order for her drink. After the warning I said, "Please don't. He has refused."

"What? Who has refused?"

"I don't know him but he seems to be the one who controls me."

"I don't understand."

"It is difficult to understand since I also don't but he has just saved my life. He has had control over me since I left pri . . ." I held myself on time. I almost gave myself away to a stranger.

"Leave my table immediately." I told her. She stood up. It was evident she thought I was very mad. That didn't worry me. Who was she to me.

Before she left, she told me, "Now see you've destroyed my luck. Two men had called me at the same time and I opted to join you."

"Then take the second choice," I said.

"He has found another one. You should ..."

"Mow look," I interrupted, "Don't overdo it if you want to get market."

"Overdo what?"

"Look, you are a brown lady yet your lips are bloody red and that lipstick stinks. Looking at your lips one gets a picture of a person who has been sucking blood. You've painted black soot

around your eyes, your nails are all red and no one is bom with red nails, that hair is badly arranged because it is leaning on the left hand side and everybody can see its a wig. Men fear such demons. Ho one can look at you once and agree to do it again. Move away you jinx." The lady didn't go back to her table but instead she went straight to the door and was swallowed by the darkness outside. I called a waiter and asked for supper. A heavy supper just as I was instructed. Whoever was giving me the Instructions seemed to know what I needed whenever I was in a jam. Again I caressed my talisman and for the first time felt like kissing it. I kissed it.

On the eleventh day, my savings had dwindled. I didn't leave Mandamano the following day as where else would I have gone. I'd have to find a lodging in any case. So I decided to stick to this one. Things were worse than before as far as my going to town was concerned. There were the WASP members to be avoided and now I had made more enemies, the Rajiv's. I felt certain that if any of the members spotted me in town, he would point me out to the police or call them by phone. They had shops on almost every street. They had two on Biashara Street, three on Tom Mboya Street, two on Moi Avenue and several others in River Road and Ronald Mgara Street and those were the places where my world rotated.

I had spent those eleven days moving from the room to the bar. Problems and thoughts in my mind had turned me to a sod and I ate very rarely. Mwangi the manager, who had become my friend, would have a good dish prepared as he had seen I was fairing badly and we'd sit together and eat. Within those days I had lost plenty of weight. Much as I had thought, I had not come up with any answers as to what kind of business I'd move to. I had tried so many starting from shoe polishing to becoming a driver and now all this had come to a brick wall. I was done with. There was only one option - to leave Nairobi.

I took out my pouch to see if I would add myself a few more days in this city I felt so reluctant to leave. I had two hundred and eight bob. Yah! A day or two more while I prepared myself, I decided.

The following night I went to bed early. I lay on it facing the ceiling flashing my mind over twenty years back in the rural area. That was where I was going. There was no doubt about it because there was no other way I would earn a living and I wasn't ready to attempt any of the businesses in which I had gone through and failed. All what I had done in the past was total failure. If there was any one job that didn't let me down, it was the latter but I was so sure I wouldn't get another place, now would I go about it?

Yes, back to my eight acres of land which my grandmother left for me. There were also the plots, I remembered excitedly. I would sell one and with the money, I'd build a shop on the other. This idea pleased

me so much. Maybe that's even what grandma wanted. She had told me I could do anything I wanted with whatever she was leaving behind. After all, I thought, rural life is not expensive. You don't rent a house in which to live in, there's no water and electricity bills, no daily bus fare to and fro, you get food from the shamba and you buy very few things with cash money because shopkeepers exchange various things with what you want. If you have two dozen eggs, you'll be given what you want amounting to thirty shillings. Yes, that is the place for me. My dear Kareithi, we are rejoining in two days time. How would Mchacho and Chali like the idea? I found myself wondering. After all those years in the lit streets of the capital city, how would they fair in a place where people use cans for lamps?

Again, I flashed back to the other side of the rural life. I saw some of my brothers' wives. They were ever busy and never had time to rest. During the day they were either picking coffee or tea. Their hands became so hard that if she gave you a slap it

would tear your flesh. The hands themselves have cracks, just like the feet which have never known the comfort of a pair of shoes. Yes, so many people in the rural area have never seen an electric bulb. Their lives rotate in their own villages. Just as Mchacho hadn't slept in a bed in his life, these people have never set their feet in a vehicle. If you tell them about town life they'll think you are mad or one big dreamer. Tell them of television sets which bring images of people who can talk, that when you listen to the news you see the person giving you the news. Talk of buildings which have hundreds of rooms on top of each other and that to go to those top rooms you use lifts. They can't even believe that in some of those tall buildings there are parkings. Tell them you can talk with someone who is over five thousand miles from you through something called a telephone and they wouldn't listen any more.

Yes, that was the kind of life that I was going to live. I was going to live with those people. I'd even marry. I laughed at the thought. How would my wife be? Would she be picking coffee and fetching water with ajar which she would carry on her back uphill? Would she be so

busy that she'd be forced to be taking a bath maybe once a month after all those tiring days? It was crazy to think about it but what other option was there? I had to go the day after the one following.

I took a towel early in the morning, tied it around my thin waist and went to the bathroom. This was my thirteenth day in the lodging and my first time to go to bath within the same period of time. After the bath I went back to my room to pack. I had to leave before schedule as I couldn't afford the room for another night. Thinking about my future life in the rural area had set me crazy. I had woken up, gone to the bar and drank heavily. The following day I had continued drinking and when I got sober this particular morning, I realised I had remained with only enough money for bus fare to my rural home.

I had a few days earlier gone to town and collected my bag with the clothes I had taken for cleaning. I had also taken my friends' clothes which were together with mine. An idea of trying to look for them around town had crossed my mind but the risks involved discouraged me. I had gone back to my lodging hoping that one day we'd meet and I'd gladly hand over the clothes to them. But it was a hopeless hope regarding where I was going. If Kareithi wasn't fairing well where clothes were concerned, then he would be lucky. Me would put on jean trousers and expensive T-shirts for the first time .

Too bad that I couldn't afford breakfast or a cup of soup, I thought as I packed. At around 10.30 am I went out to Mwangi's office to see whether he had arrived. I was feeling very weak and hungry and I was sure if I explained my situation to him he'd order a mug of soup for me. I could not afford to buy myself anything out of what I had because I didn't know how far up the bus fare to my inheritance had gone. Mwangi was in. His door was ajar so he saw me even before I knocked and asked me to get in. I took a seat opposite him. Me stopped writing on the cash book and stood up to shake my hand. I was about to tell him of my problems when the telephone rang. Me picked it and after a few seconds of listening he said, "I'll come right away." To me he said, "Just hung around in this office. I'll be back in five minutes. Have you taken breakfast?" I shook my head. "I'll have

someone send you something. I'll be back." He closed the door behind him. Twenty minutes later, he had not come back and the 'something' had not been brought.

I saw a newspaper on top of a filing cabinet and I stood to get it. I wanted to keep myself busy so as to forget that I was hungry, and that Mwangi had now taken over twenty minutes. It was sometime since I read newspapers. More than one year in fact. I checked the date and it read 'Sunday 25 March'. What date is today? I asked myself glancing at my watch. Wednesday 17 April, what year? I went back to the newspaper which I had now

realised was over twenty days old. '1989', I read. Christ! And I thought I had lived for five years since I left gaol. Was it true that it was really under two years? I couldn't believe it. I felt so old. My problems and difficulties made me feel like I had been swimming in them for years.

The first news item I read was of a nine year old girl having given birth in Kenyatta Hospital. I couldn't believe it who would? Which son of man in his right senses would leave all the beautiful ladies working in all these buildings in the city, all the women in the thousands of city bars waiting for men, and go to do it to a nine year old? Or was it another minor who was responsible? Another nine to twelve year old? Men, you'll never know with them! I thought and dismissed the issue. What was it to me anyway?

Chapter Four

I turned over the pages without reading. The knowledge that the paper was old had left a psychological effect on me. I came to the Ads page. Here I stopped a bit to read sales of cars, TVs, radios, maisonettes and the like. Yah! The things for the blessed, I thought as I read on. I saw something that almost stopped my heart beat. 'DRIVER WANTED' I read 'CALL PERSONALLY, TAJIRI ESTATE, CHURCHILL ROAD - MRS WICKS!' Why hadn't I seen this on Sunday 25th. That old white woman must have got a driver by now or can I try for the sake of it?

'Yes, Wamathina, there's no harm in it and you've nothing to lose. The

chances are slim alright but you never know, could be this advert has run for months as this is a page for tycoons and you just chanced to read it in order to pass time.' I decided to give it a try. I would go there on foot, cross Juja Road, go down Mathare Valley, cross that dirty river and go along Mathare Mental Hospital, get to Thika Road, cross it and I'd be staring at the Harem for the Lords, the place for millionaires and millionairesses. 'Maybe if I'm lucky, the millionairess will order some lunch for me. If I bounced, I'd just retreat back to Thika Road where I'd stop a bus to Murang'a.' I checked the time and saw it was heading to 11.00 am. Mwangi hadn't come and the 'something' he had promised me hadn't come either. I stood up, there was no point of waiting for someone who probably by now had forgotten all about me and was busy on other things. I got out of his office, left word to a barmaid that I had left, then set off for Tajiri Estate.

I arrived at the gate where a small sign board read 'Mrs Wicks.' It wasn't an easy job to trace the house because even

though the place was described by a road, you could not see the home from the road. However I learnt later that from where there was a small road branching off from Churchill Road, there was also another arrow shaped sign board with the same name of Mrs Wicks. At the gate, a securicor guard appeared from a sentry box. "Your problem please," he asked without even a hint that he would open the gate.

"I have come to see Mrs Wicks," I said.

"Have you got an appointment?"

"Oh yes, though she was expecting me some twenty days ago." Me looked at me suspiciously, then seemed to decide I wasn't harmful so he opened the gate for me. I had to go down a hill and negotiate a small comer to come face to face with the bungalow.

The features of the place alone told you that you had arrived on a millionaire's ground. The house was surrounded by flower beds. It was a one storey building. At the front, near the entrance, there were two

cars, a Range Rover and a Mercedes Benz. I went ahead towards the vehicles with the asphalt on the road screeching under the pressure of my shoes.

I had on a pair of corduroy trousers, an expensive pair of shoes Mchacho and Chali had insisted on buying for me together with a Van Huessan shirt, a leather jacket I had bought after exchanging some of the dollars and a Jackson 5 cap. Looking at me on face value, you wouldn't believe that apart from fifty shillings in my pockets, three shirts, two pairs of long trousers, an extra underwear and a shaving kit, I hadn't anything else on this goddamn earth. And if we were to count them as mine, a cow and a calf under Kareithi's care, a grass thatched hui which was as good as a shanty, eight acres of land and two plots whose title deeds were consumed down by fire in Mathare Valley. How I would claim the land and the plots without the title deeds was one thing which up to now I hadn't the vaguest idea

about. I was afraid that if some evil minded person approached Kareithi and advised him on the issue, it would be difficult for me to claim the land. Right now I depended on Kareithi's ignorance and honesty and if these two things failed him, then I was certainly sunk. But right this moment, the job first, the inheritance second since the city is where I belonged.

"Hujambo, Bwana," I heard the voice before I saw the one who saluted me. He appeared from behind the Range Rover. A short brown man putting on a blue dust coat and a 'talabushi' cap. His Swahili accent told me he was most likely from Coast Province, particularly Mombasa. "Umetutembelea siyo?" he continued.

"Sijambo, nimewatembelea ndiyo." Then he continued talking, as I did the listening.

" Umemwelezaje yule fisi ndiyo akakufungulia ? Mshenziyeye afikiria hapa ni kwake hamkubalii yeyote kupita pale. Tia akianza kula bwana, la, humtoikwa chakula, ala kama hayawani. " I felt so tired, hungry and weary but I couldn't help laughing. A chatter box, I thought. I told him that I said I had an appointment with Mrs Wicks.

"Wataka kazi ama ni mambo mengine."

"Kazi ya dereva, nitaipata kweli?" I learnt it wasn't difficult but I was shocked to hear I would be the fifth driver in eight months.

"Are you a painter as well?" he asked me, intending it to be a hint of what I was to expect on getting the driving job.

"I've never done painting in my life," I answered.

"And mowing?"

"Neither that."

"Then of course you know how to replace broken tiles on the roof? Don't say no because it would be too bad for you. The woman is a tigress and from looking at you, one month here is next to impossible. Anyway go and wait there." He indicated a

garden chair made of metal and hard wood decorated with the colours of the spectrum. He turned to go to his duty. I was to learn later that his name was Bakari and he was the gardener.

"Excuse me," I called before he left. "I feel very thirsty. Would you advise me on how I could get a cup of water?" He pointed to a path leading to the back of the building.

"The kitchen is behind there. You'll meet a young girl in the kitchen. Just knock and tell her your problem. If she likes your face she'll gladly give you some but if she doesn't which is most likely, she'll bang the door on your face." I turned and followed the path wondering whether this wasn't hell. It seemed everybody was hostile except the chatterbox.

I didn't have to knock as the back door opened just as I came in sight. What I saw almost stopped my heart. She was about eighteen, twenty at most if not less judging from her face. She was the most beautiful thing I had set my eyes on. About five feet tall, brown with beautiful

black hair which looked like a present from heaven. Her fat cheeks and proportionate round eyes made you think that she was doing the wrong job. To complete the picture, I found myself looking around her hips. Wonderful I thought, then looked down to her legs. You would think the Wakamba's in Qikomba had done the carving. What she put on didn't matter, nothing else could have made her look better. One thing was certain, I would never forget that picture. It became engraved on my mind.

"Some water please, I am dying of thirst," I said. Without an answer she turned and closed the door behind her. Remembering the chatterbox's words, I turned, moving towards where the garden chair was. 'No doubt she doesn't like me,' I thought.

"Hi there." I turned. She was at the door with a mug and a jug of water in her hands. "I am sorry," she said when I got back, "what got into your mind?"

"I thought you had dismissed me. Someone had given me such a hint."

"Jesus, that must be Bakari."

"If that is the name of that parrot in a dust coat." She smiled as she handed a mug of water to me.

"The parrot? I call him kasuku. It looks like we think the same about him. Another mug of water? You must be very thirsty." She asked, surprised that after taking such a great mug, I still needed more.

I almost told her that one was supposed to represent lunch which I was sure I wasn't going to have.

I returned the mug to her. If she hadn't shown her surprise I would still have asked for more as I was terribly hungry. She didn't go as I expected. Instead she engaged me in a talk. After talking for about five minutes, I came to the question I wanted to ask every second she made a comma.

"Do you think I'll get this job."

"I can't be certain. It is the first time I've seen a person of your age here. I mean most of her drivers have been old men, not under forty at least."

"I am not so young myself. I am about forty," I said thinking that it would make some difference. She smiled, either doubting it or reading my mind.

"Well, at present she's using a taxi and she doesn't like it. Yet she is not able to keep the drivers she gets. Let's hope she'll take you." I noticed some concern in her talk which somehow gave some hope, if not for the job, at least for her. I had fallen in love for the first time in many years.

"Then the parrot was right about her being spit-fire?"

She laughed and asked, "Is that how he described her? A funny spit-fire."

"no, those are my words. Me called her a tigress." Again she laughed. She seemed to be in a very good mood, and if not, then

she liked me, making me think that after all the parrot knew what he was talking about. I didn't know what to say about her, I mean being a housegirl there isn't much she could expect of me. But Bakari understood her best. He had been with her for the past five years.

"If I get the job, what she is doesn't matter. I mean, I don't mind being pushed about. I have been to worse places and I am tolerant. Thirteen days ago I was working for an Indian and you cannot compare Indian employers with any other existing race. I've done a turn in gaol, I've pushed wagons in the city streets and around the estates and I've once been a shoe shiner. I've done odd jobs in my life and I've had innumerable problems." To pass time, I gave her my story right from when I left gaol. From how my own people disowned me up to the moment I was standing with her. By the time I had finished, she was

weeping. I completed with, "Right now as I stand with you here, I haven't tasted food for two days."

"Please stop there," she broke down, a handkerchief now in her hand to dry her eyes off the tears which were doing the injustice of dirtying her clean beautiful fat cheeks. She opened the door and invited me.

"Please come in. I am so stupid not to have realised it. There's an hour before she comes, in which I can warm some food for you." She gave me a chair in the kitchen. In ten minutes, I had a dish of food in my hands. I could not help eating greedily. After the dish, she gave me a cup of milk. Milk, man, after so many years.

"I thought I was the only one," she said as I continued with the mug full of milk.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I have had problems in my life, but I can't compare them with yours. You've made me feel different and I am grateful I met you. What's your name please?"

"Wamathina."

"Are your serious?"

"Very serious."

"Then it matches your problems," she smiled. "You don't have a christian name?"

"They gave me the name Adams when I was a kid. Mo one calls me by the name now. Everybody calls me Son of rate."

"You must be a very funny person. Ha! ha! ha! I think I like your names."

"What's yours?"

"Eva Wanaruona."

"Excuse my curiosity Eva and tell me, how is it that you came to land in a place like this. I mean, this kind of a job? To me you look like you can find something far much better although I don't know much about your background. I just feel curious and that should be understandable having been a journalist in my life."

She stopped what she was doing, took a stool and sat on it facing me. Looking at her face, I saw she had made some kind of decision. I waited, then she told me, "I'll tell you everything. I must tell somebody about my life and it is going to be you."

"My father as I hear, died when I was two years old. I was the only child of the couple. My mother did not remarry. My uncles, after my father's death, conspired and sent my mother away from the tiny piece of land which belonged to my father. My mother struggled to get the piece of land back but in vain. There were no certificates or anything else to prove that she was my father's wife. She had no option but to leave. Her parents were very poor and she couldn't go back to them. They had problems of their own and mother didn't want to add them more. She therefore went with me to a settlement scheme where we joined others whose work was to pick coffee from the whiteman's farms. That is where I grew up. She saved every penny she got

and when I was old enough to go to school, she sent me to a nearby primary school. She did everything she could to make sure my education was not interrupted by lack of school fees, building funds, harambee contributions and the like. Seeing how she bothered herself, I put so much effort such that I became very good in school. I was always the best, both in primary and in secondary schools. I was her only hope in life and my performance in school gave her morale.

"During my fourth year in secondary school, mother became sick. She was hospitalized for six months. When she came back things were different. She could not afford the school fees for the final year and to make matters worse, there was the examination fee. I tried all ways but I couldn't raise anything. Yet it was very important that I sit for the

final examinations because without that all the efforts would have gone down the drain. Eventually, mother decided to send me to a distant cousin of hers who had twice helped her but warned her not to keep on bothering him. I went to see her cousin whom I was supposed to call my uncle. He could give me the money on only one condition," she stopped there and seemed not willing to continue.

"What was the condition?" I asked thinking her story was more sad than mine.

"Well, it was a bad one. I was in my final year, I wanted to finish school and sit for my exams which I was sure I would do very well. I had to fulfill the condition."

"Do I really understand?" I said more to myself than to her.

"I don't see why not. That's how I got a child."

"Your uncle! That's incredible."

"And imagine I tried to plead with him but all in vain. I'll never forgive myself for that."

"Mo, no, no, don't say that. You had no option. Did you sit for the examination after all?"

"Yes, I did though I never went to see the results. When I realised I was pregnant I confided in my best friend Susan. It was obvious I was going to be expelled anytime. So we both decided I should leave before I was expelled. I couldn't go home as that would have killed my mother. There was an old woman who used to sell ripe bananas and cook arrow roots outside the school gate. She used to be very kind to all students in our school. She lived nearby. Susan proposed that we approach the woman so that I go to stay with her. Susan would be feeding me through the woman with the lesson's notes as they continued. The woman agreed and during the weekend, I moved to her home. Susan kept on feeding me with the lessons, but life was not the same anymore. The old woman in the first place made me her servant.

I couldn't be able to read enough because I was ever tired. She had two goats which came under my care the moment I was shown where to sleep. I'd cook for her, go to fetch water with ajar a kilometre down the hill, come up hill with the jar full of water together with the goats' food. And imagine I was pregnant. Every time she would find something for me to do. She was barren and deserted by her own relatives. By the time I thought of reading a bit, I would be so tired I'd start dozing by the fireside where I did the reading. But there's one thing that pleased me with the exams. Most of the questions came from what I had already learned in school. Most of what we had covered in forms two and ..."

"And why the hell didn't you check the results? May be if . . ."

"It was too late. By then I felt completely mad and, I delivered by the time the results were coming out. I couldn't stand the whole thing anyway."

"So what happened?" I was curious now. The story, though sad was very interesting.

"I continued with my slavery. The old witch wouldn't give me a break. One and a half years later, when the child could eat by

himself, I got so mad and left the home intending to commit suicide. I couldn't go back to my mother with a child as a school certificate. Sometimes I don't even believe I am still living. This is why I told you, your story made me feel different. I wish you would get this job and be near me. I feel like your presence will change me for the better."

'Two Wamathinas.' I thought and thanked fate for the first time to have brought me here disregarding whether I would get the job or not. Meeting Eva was an achievement in itself.

I left the kitchen when Eva decided to start preparing her mistress' lunch. She escorted me up to the garden chair which was in front of the bungalow. "I'll pray for you to get the job," she told me before she left.

"Don't make that mistake please."

"What? Which mistake?"

"Praying for me. If you want me to get the job, pray that I don't."

"Don't be funny. I am very serious."

"Not more than I am. Honestly speaking I've never prayed for a thing and got it. When I pray for rain I get sunshine. It is hard to believe but that is the truth."

"Are you an atheist?"

"No, I am Son of rate." She laughed and went away. I didn't have to be told I had won her heart.

I put my bag down on the garden chair then stretched myself on the chair using the bag as a pillow. I faced the blue skies trying to see if there would appear a bright star and then lie to myself that it was my star. Somehow I had gained much hope which I think was raised by the heavy dish and the mug of milk I had just taken. Surprisingly, I found myself thinking along a line that I had never touched in my life. I was thinking about a woman -Eva.

I woke up when I heard the tyres of a moving vehicle grinding the asphalt. Thinking about Eva had made me sleep, probably

enhanced by the warmth of the mug of milk. A black Benz came to a stop just a few metres away from where I was. I put my legs on the ground and sat up. A lady opened the door of the taxi and stepped out. She was about thirty, judging from her looks, expensively dressed and her hair was permed. "The millionairess secretary/ I thought and stood up when she looked at me.

"What can I do for you?" she asked me.

"I do not know in fact but I want to see Mrs Wicks. You can organize for an appointment probably if you are her secretary."

"What do you want?"

"She was looking for a driver some twenty days ago. I saw the advert."

"You may come in." I followed her. The taxi by then had gone, the driver having been instructed to come back by 2.00 pm.

"What do you think of her yourself. I hear she's a spit-fire. Can you persuade her to give me the job?" I had become a chatterbox myself.

"Who told you that?" she asked me as we entered the sitting room. I didn't answer though I had a ready answer. What I was staring at was something I had not seen in my life. riot even when I had big money. The carpet I was stepping on must have cost a five figure amount of money. It matched the covers of the sofa set the window curtains, the big wall unit at the corner and more surprising, the wall itself. The coffee tables, book-shelf, TV stand and wine cabinet had the same colour and they were glittering such that if you went nearer and looked closely, you'd see your image on them. This room I was in was my idea of heaven if it existed. Being in this room made me feel so inferior such that I started doubting whether I'd get the job. A job in heaven? Incredible.

"Who told you that?" she reminded me.

"Oh that? Can't say who in particular. You know a bad name spreads like bushfire"

"What do you think of her yourself?"

"Fortunately for me I am the type that doesn't believe all that is said." I took a seat when she invited me and put my bag beside myself. It had become part of me since I left gaol.

"I am Mrs Wicks," she announced then asked for my driving licence. Surprised, I took out the driving licence and my cap at the same time and immediately apologized.

"I am sorry, madam. I mean I was expecting an aged white lady. It is a surprise."

She didn't answer. She threw the driving licence on the coffee table and said, "It looks new. For how long have you been a driver?"

"About twenty years, madam." She looked at me as if not believing.

"Can I see your ID card." My age, I thought and gave it to her. I saw her face frown and I knew she hadn't believed it.

Before she asked me I said "I was about seventeen when I did my driving test."

"And what have you been doing with your life since then?"

It was the most difficult question and I had been afraid it would come. Before I thought of a good lie which of course was to be very difficult I remembered a word my grandfather had told me. Grandfather was a senior chief during colonial days and was liked by almost everybody - even the Mau Mau. He had told me that if I wanted to get rid of self contradictions and in order to feel right wherever I was, if necessary I should always tell the truth about myself. That I should always admire and be thankful about my past disregarding how bad it might be.

'Regard every bit of thing you've come across in the past as an experience. What should matter most is the present, how you live the present . . .' I decided to follow his advice. He was a wise man and probably that was why he had made it so high in life.

I told Mrs Wicks, "I am afraid madam that I've spent most of

those years in prison." It ought to have surprised her but if it did she didn't show it.

"What offence?" Oh my, there goes the job, I thought.

"Robbery with violence. I carried gangsters after a bank raid. They surrendered me to the police two months later when they were

arrested."

"For how long were you sent in?"

"I did ten years."

"After that? What did you do when you got out?" She showed much interest such that it surprised me. I decided to tell it all.

"I did studies while in prison. When I got out I became a journalist, did a few years as a freelancer then they sent me back for sedition. I got out about two years ago. I've been doing odd jobs since. Then ..."

"What odd jobs?" she interrupted. I gave her the story till now. I saw her sigh with some kind of a relief especially when I came to where I ran away handcuffed.

"You are a frank person. Aren't you afraid about losing the job after telling of such a horrible past?"

"Well, madam, whatever else might be said about me, the truth is, I am an honest person." She seemed to agree with me about that point. She threw the ID card on the coffee table.

"How much was the Indian paying you?" She asked.

"Twelve hundred," I lied for the first time.

"Okay, I'll give you seventeen hundred, food and shelter. Can you start right away?"

"Yes, madam." I couldn't believe it. From eight hundred shillings, a garage house and eventually handcuffs to one thousand and seven hundred shillings in heaven. There was no other way my star would shine. I thanked my grandmother for her prophecy and promised myself to kiss the talisman the moment I got out of my mistress's sight. She then called Eva. When she came she was given instructions to show me the servant quarters.

"Get him two blankets, two bed sheets and whatever else you think he needs in the rooms.* Eva nodded and smiled when our eyes met. She left immediately she was dismissed and Mrs Wicks turned her attention back to me.

"Call the taxi man who has brought me and tell him I don't need his services today." She was pointing where the phone was.

"Number please," I asked.

"You must have noticed the label of the company if you are any good." Christ I thought, how the rich behave. What was simpler, to give me a six digit number or talking one lengthy sentence of fourteen words. What would she think if I told her that. I had seen more than the taxis label. For instance that as she stepped out of the car she let me see she was putting on a white underpant. I smiled as I got up to get to the telephone directory. Two minutes and I got the number.

"That's it," I said on the phone when the other side asked me if I wanted Super Transport. "I am calling to tell you that Mrs Wicks doesn't need a taxi this afternoon. She's just engaged a driver."

"It's a pity," the man on the other side said.

"What?"

"I mean I pity the driver. He'll have one terrible month if he's tolerant. If it is you stick to the ads page for another job within the month." Seventeen hundred shillings a month, shelter, food and driving a Benz or a Rover and someone talks of pitying me? I was vexed. Without knowing I was doing it, I started blasting whoever I was talking to.

"Listen you stupid dreaming idiot! Mrs Wicks is my boss and I cannot stand anybody talking ill of her. Whatever she is, she's my boss and I am there to protect her . . . stop your apologies you bastard and consider yourself very lucky to be out of my reach. I'd have taught you a lesson you will never forget. And you had better stay warned that if there's anyway I can trace you,

you'll be in for a terrible surprise. Bullshit!* I banged the phone back on its cradle.

I had lost my temper for reasons I couldn't tell. When I looked up, I saw Mrs Wicks just a few metres away looking at me. Eva too had entered the room. I couldn't have heard their footsteps because of the heavy carpet. The two ladies exchanged glances, then looked at me. They had heard everything I had talked. I didn't know what to do next, so I just stood there waiting for the next move thinking that my temper should be controlled in future. But I was wrong. I was protecting my boss and she liked every word of it. She extended her hand, and gave me two sets of keys.

"Prepare any of the two cars. I'll be ready by 2.00 o'clock." She went upstairs while Eva took a plate from a sideboard in the room and went out. I sighed with relief, took my bag and cap and went out through the front door.

I put my bag, cap and jacket on the garden chair, ready to start working on the vehicle. I went to the back of the house and asked Eva to get me some water in about ten minutes' time. I started with the Benz. I unlocked it and entered. I wanted to check everything thoroughly. I pulled the bonnet catch and got out to the engine. I checked the engine oil, water in the radiator, the break fluid, and the battery terminals until I was satisfied they were alright. I went in, put the head lights on, then the indicators and got out again. Those too gave me a satisfactory result. I had seen some movement of the window curtain upstairs and I knew the boss was watching me. It was my time to show her I knew my job and I did it. I went back behind the steering wheel. I made sure the gear lever was free. I ignited the engine, checked the fuel gauge and all was well. I gave the engine some three minutes to warm up, then pressed the accelerator a bit, released it and pressed the brake pedal to check if the return springs were functioning. They were alright.

I got out, closed the bonnet and bent in again. This time to try the wipers. The Benz was quite perfect. I reversed it out of the carport, engaged gear number one and drove up to the gate then back. I would

use that one, I decided, now the Range Rover.

Eva arrived as I reparked the Benz. She had brought the water I had asked for. I took a small rug from inside the car and dipped into the water which she had brought in a plastic basin. I was wiping the head lamps when she told me, "She is watching you from her bedroom upstairs but don't look.* I smiled at her ignorance and decided to teach her.

"Next time if you want to show someone something and you don't want him to look, you start with the latter, alright? Don't look where I'll show you, then . . . bla . . . bla . . . bla . . . If I didn't know she was watching me, I'd have looked before you warned me."

She laughed, "You are very interesting. I am beginning to think I'll learn much from you."

"If you want, no doubt. But in the meantime let's not play Romeo and Juliet if we don't want one of us sacked. Please don't laugh, she's still watching." But she laughed even louder.

"Now can I help laughing when you're so funny. If there's one thing which will surprise her, it is to see me happy. She has never even seen me smile."

"Which is why one of us is going to lose his job." She continued laughing on her way to the kitchen. She was making me feel a real man.

My job started at precisely 2.00 o'clock. By the time she got out of the front door, I was seated behind the wheel. If I was supposed to be out of the car waiting for her so that I would open the door for her, then I did a big mistake. I was hoping that she would know from my story that I'd never been a chauffeur before and if there was anything she wanted me to know, she would teach me. I was ready and willing to be taught. Seventeen

hundred shillings per month wasn't peanuts especially to a former

shoe shiner. Yes, that kind of money would make me stand a slap on the face if she felt like doing it hoping that my temper would hold.

"Co-operative House," she said as I ignited the engine. I took off. At the gate the security guard was ready with the gate open. I climbed the stiff hill which not most cars would do comfortably, then got to the main road. In five minutes, I found a parking outside Co-operative House.

As I switched off the engine I said, "Excuse me, madam. I chose to come with this car because it has a slight defect in the engine. If you would refer me to your ..." It was a lie, just to show her I knew my job.

"I'll call D.T. Dobbie from my office to say that you are going. Is it anything that can take more than two hours. Would you know? I wanted to go to Nairobi Hospital within two hours."

"It won't take more than one hour."

"Okay, you know the place in Industrial Area?"

Tes, madam." I locked her door when she stepped out then locked mine and followed. She stopped when she realised I was behind.

"Yes, what is it?"

"nothing, madam, I just want to see you to your office. "At the lift a guy blocked her way in what seemed like a hurry. I gave him a push to one side paving way for my boss. The guy not knowing the lady with a body guard moved away and stayed out of reach. He didn't want to risk getting involved with a cabinet minister's wife.

"Fourteenth floor," she said. I pressed the button. There were about seven other people with us in the lift. All their eyes were on this mistress with a body guard and I could see Mrs Wicks was feeling good. On the fourteenth floor three other people were getting out but they made sure they gave Mrs Wicks

way with me behind her. I was giving them an eye that would scare a blind man. I was just making sure that I deserved earning the cool thousand and the several hundreds on top of it.

From the hospital, I drove Mrs Wicks to Muthaiga Members Club where we left for home at around 6.45 pm. What a nice day!

I opened the door to my house at precisely 7.00 pm. The scent which welcomed my entry was something I had never smelt in life. Eva had borrowed the mistress' air freshener and used it in my room. The room itself had been thoroughly cleaned. It was self contained. There was a beautiful sofa set in the tiny sitting room which I later learned Mrs Wicks had thrown away as old. One had to think of looking for the word in the dictionary to see if it had other meanings other than the simple one - not new; aged.

I entered the bedroom to other surprises. Eva wasn't following our mistress' orders. She had been instructed to give me two blankets and two sheets probably from a store. Mere I saw before anything else a bed cover which must have cost about three quarters of my salary. There were two bed sheets folded and put on a bedside table and two were on the bed which was already made. Here again there was that beautiful scent. As my surprise sunk, I realised my clothes had been cleaned and were on hangers on the wall. On seeing that, the first question which got into my mind was; had Eva seen the countless lice that had been feeding on me? I felt so embarrassed. But I was glad I had given her my story without leaving out a single thing.

She brought my supper at 7.30 pm. I opened the door for her when she knocked. She put a tray on the coffee table. The amount of food she had brought made me think that, she was intending to take supper with me but the cutlery told me otherwise. The sweet smell of the food made my stomach demand it urgently. She said, "I am surprised.*

"Sorry . . .' I said.

"I said I am surprised."

"Oh! I see. That I am going to sink this dish into my belly after the amount I took during the day? It's you who put it. I didn't say I would sink the whole lot." She burst into peals of laughter.

"Don't be funny. I am surprised that Mrs Wicks can say someone does something well. I've never shared a talk with her since I came here and today she brought forward some talk."

"About?"

"You. I think you amused her."

"She might think differently when she asks me to paint the house or replace broken tiles."

"I don't think she will. Good night. She's watching TV and might press the bell switch to call me."

"Is that what she does?"

"Yes, I'll come for the plates. What do you prefer after supper. Coffee, milk, cocoa, tea or milk?" I didn't answer at first. I just looked at her. She seemed more beautiful than the first time I saw her. I could neither believe what I was hearing, nor what I was looking at.

"Was this really happening to me, Wamathina alias Son of Tate? No, this is another dream which will come to an end and the moment it does, I'll just fall down and die."

"What dream? I don't get you." I realised I was thinking aloud.

"Sorry . . . just get me what you prefer." She went out.

I took my supper, silently and without any hurry but deep in thought. Yes, this could be true because Eva Wanaruona was here a few minutes ago and she brought this dish I am eating. She also confirmed to me that it wasn't a dream by asking me a question. It is very true that I have just stepped out from behind the wheels of a Benz. Yes, there are so many things I am seeing which tell me very loudly that I

am not dreaming. But Wamathina, don't most of the things you lay your hands on become sour just when you are about to gain hope. What is

going to crumble this one? Or has the star shone at last? Another mouthful.

If Bakari was right about Mrs Wicks being a tigress, then she was giving me special treatment. I had now driven her for two months. I was on the third and during that time she hadn't asked me to do anything outside my line of work. She never talked much and I had reasons to believe that she was naturally not a talkative person. On various occasions I had made her burst to laughter by my funny comments and odd ways of looking at things. I remember her commenting one day that if I sat down and wrote about my experiences in life, I would make a great book. This had surprised me because she had not heard a quarter of my experiences. My body guard act amused her - the rich yearn for respect and popularity just like the way the poor yearn for riches. I would at times ask passers-by in the corridors, "Way please", one hand pointing at Mrs Wicks from behind while the other indicated where I want her highness to pass through. They would give way and she'd go through with a pose of a dignitary - which she was.

Oh! Life was so good. The image behind the mirror whenever I shaved wasn't the one I knew for many years. Eva was doing her best to make sure I missed nothing from this house of a millionairess. We had fallen in love and made sure we exhausted every minute we got talking about ourselves. We had agreed on saving and we were on the route to opening a joint bank account. But Mrs Wicks was not going to know about it.

My job was easy. We'd arrive in the office at around 8.30 am. I would pick her at 12.45 pm for lunch. Whenever she was going out she'd let me know so as to hang around the office. In the evening we would go to the members club where she learnt judo and karate. On Sundays, it was to the theatre and the golf club. She was a sports lady. I became known in the members club and was allowed to go round anywhere

within. Mrs Wicks

was a share holder in the 'members only' club.

In the fifth month, I decided to retrain myself on self defence tactics. I enrolled myself for evening lessons instead of waiting in the car bored or moving about in the club without doing anything forcing me to take a seat and ask for a beer. This was a decision which opened a new chapter in my life. Death Stared at me and riches stared at me from the opposite side. It was one gamble I couldn't help to lose.

"Had you tried this game sometimes before you joined us?*" asked my new instructor whom I later learnt held a black belt in judo and karate.

"Yes, Sir, about fifteen years ago."

"Wo wonder you are so good. You are one of our best now. We have decided you will represent our club in our next inter-clubs karate competition two months from now." This was announced only three months since I joined the club. I had kept this hidden from Mrs Wicks who did her training in another wing. You didn't mix millionaires and millionairesses with the common man.

To keep physically fit, I decided I'd start exercising by jogging. I bought myself a track suit and a pair of sports shoes. I changed my time of waking up. I'd wake up at 5.45 am, put on my track suit and get to the road. I'd run round the estate which belonged to the rich. There were three puppies which had decided to join me every morning. We had jogged together so much that every morning when I opened the door, they'd be there waiting. The sight of my track suit had become common to them and it assured them of a jog. By the time I closed the door they'd be off towards the gate. The sentry had also got used to it. Seeing the puppies, he'd know I am right behind and I'd find the gate open. The dogs had learnt the route by instinct. They'd lead me throughout the route till we got back. Previously when I pulled the wagon I had built up my body and this had

played a very good part in my life, especially contributing to my judo

and karate games. Of course grandfather was right - every part in one's past life is a helpful experience in the future .

The two months passed like two weeks. I was ready for the competition which was to be held in this same club. I invited Eva. I instructed her to ask for an off-duty that Saturday. With someone to cheer me, I knew I'd do well, especially if it was going to be Eva. I took her to town and bought her a very beautiful and expensive dress - the millionairess' class. I took her to a hair salon and paid four hundred and fifty shillings for a perm. We visited Tender Touch and got out with the best pair of shoes. When we got home, I was satisfied to see we had spent close to three thousand shillings on her without counting the amount she paid for her new watch.

That Saturday, I was also very free. The boss had told me she would be very busy in the club where she had instructed me to drive her in the morning. She did not need me again until late in the evening. I saw my instructor and asked for some minutes to be out. It was during this time that I took my mistress' car and went for Eva. I knew I was taking a great risk but I didn't care. I went and got Eva. She did not know where I wanted to take her. I hadn't even told her that I wanted her to cheer me in a fight. I had just told her I wanted her to accompany me to a party. It was her first time to leave home. The shopping was always done by Mrs Wicks so she never got any excuse to go out. She didn't know anything about the city centre except what she heard from people. So this day was a great one in her life. I took her around the town, showed her the places she asked to be shown noting that every time we parked the Benz and got out, every eye of the pedestrians around would be on us. At Six Eighty Hotel, after parking the Benz beside a Range Rover that had just arrived, I made friends with the owner who even proposed to pay for our lunch. Who would tell him that we were only a chauffeur and a

house-maid of the owner of the Benz and that right then we were risking our jobs? After the lunch, I drove Eva to the club where the games were about to begin.

By the time the games were starting, we were seated together. I had

invited a friend of mine to sit with us. This friend was a boxer and we would watch him not more than an hour after. We watched two bouts together with the friend, then he went to prepare himself. When he got to the ring I asked Eva, "Do you know any of those characters?"

"Mow do you expect me . . . oh, Jesus isn't this Otieno who has been with us here?" She was excited but I could read plenty of fear on her face.

The commentator introduced them, then the fight*started. The fight was the toughest that night. The two slight heavy weights were both hard guys. Every time Otieno was cornered, I would feel Eva's hand searching for mine, her nails sinking into my flesh. Luckily she didn't grow long nails. Then Otieno whose tactics of letting his opponent think he was the better fighter, had always surprised people at the end. He started doing it now - hitting his tired opponent double punches, enjoying the fight and appearing as if he had just entered the ring feeling very fresh. As the spectators called loudly "Otti, Otti, Otti!" I realised Eva was also calling and clapping. Then Otti gave his opponent a knockout and the bout was over. As Otti raised both hands after victory, Eva was on her feet, clapping. I've never felt so happy. She had told me she only watched such fights on the TV and never thought she would get a chance of seeing them live.

"You'll see this programme too. Most likely tomorrow." I showed her where the media group was and told her who the photographers she was seeing were.

Then to my surprise she asked, "Why don't you do boxing dear, although I would hate to see someone sit on you that way?"

"I'll try one day." I didn't tell her more. I knew she'd get the

surprise of her life within one hour from then. I was waiting for Otieno to come and keep her company, then I'd go to prepare myself. He came minutes later and I went.

Seeing Eva watching and almost weeping when I got kicked and

knocked down made me throw kicks like a mule. During a short break, I saw she was smiling. When I got back to the fight, it was to finish up my opponent. I was later to know that the man I had just downed had twice competed in the Common Wealth games outside the country. I had seen where Mrs Wicks was seated with the other sponsors. When my name was called, it hadn't made sense to her but it did when I entered the ring. I glanced at her and saw her talking to a tycoon seated next to her, pointing at me as she did so. I could guess she was saying I was her driver, if not, then she was surprised to see me in the ring. When the referee took my hand, raising it up to declare me the winner, Mrs Wicks was among the many who clapped their hands happily and shouting. I didn't have to look at Eva to know she was clapping her hands while standing up. Everybody had to, especially those who belonged to this club. I had just beaten a person who had sat on the shoulders of the famous millionaires' club.

After the match I changed and took Eva to the bar. Every drink was supplied free. We took seats at the furthest corner and were brought drinks. I had ordered some alcoholic drinks for myself which I diluted with soda. We couldn't have the privacy I wanted as everybody who watched the match wanted to shake hands with me. Some wanted my address and my particulars, fifteen minutes later, Mrs Wicks came to our table. When she came close enough, she recognized the beautiful mistress with me. I saw her face become pale. She observed her closely, from the head down to the feet. I think she was admiring whatever garment Eva had put on. Apparently, Eva happened to be the most beautiful lady in the club that day. I hadn't failed to notice

that, although whoever was coming to our table had me in mind, they only turned their interest to me after eyeing Eva to their satisfaction. It did not surprise me then when Mrs Wicks did the same. For the first time our mistress shook hands with Eva and me.

"It seems there's so much I don't know about my own driver?" Those were her first words as she took a seat beside Eva. A person who knew her (Mrs Wicks) had surrendered it with a bow of respect.

"Not so much, madam," I answered. "It is only part of that past which

I had not talked about during my interview."

"You mean you've done it before."

"Yes, but not much. That was fifteen years back."

"You are so good."

"Oh, thank you, madam." Every time she talked, I could see she glanced at Eva through the corners of her eyes. I didn't like it at all. The more she did it the more my instincts sensed danger. I could read hatred and some kind of envy on her face. We neither had much to talk in the presence of our boss nor anything to talk with the boss herself. Sensing this, she gave us a break and left. She had been with us for a good thirty minutes.

"You know what?" I asked Eva when our mistress went. "I can see the end of job for one of us."

"But who cares. If it's me I'll just move to your place. If it's you, the two of us go."

"Mo, dear, I won't spoil your job. If it's me I'll go alone, but I'll be . . ."

"You won't be spoiling my job, Son of Tate, you'll be securing me."

"From?"

"Her claws of course." We both laughed. It was getting late and I wanted Eva to go home. I called a taxi from the same company which used to drive Mrs Wicks. Eva left.

My boss called me at around 7.30 pm. The games were over by then and most people were preparing to go. I had been presented with a trophy which I handed over to Mrs Wicks who incidentally happened to be the chairlady. When we got to the car, I was surprised that the boss didn't want to take the rear seat as usual. She became my co-driver for the first time. On the way she opened up dialogue. "What time did Eva leave?"

"At around 5.30 pm."

"You had invited her of course?"

"Yes, I wanted someone who knew me to cheer and pity me when I got it rough. It helps."

"You bought her the dress she was wearing?"

"Yes."

"It is a very expensive dress."

"Yah, I wanted the one cheering me to look beautiful and expensive," I said.

"Yes, she looked exactly that. Are you in love with her?"

"Well ... no ... I mean I don't know. I've never fallen in love in my life, I lied for no reason."

"You've never had a girlfriend in your life?"

"I had a wife."

"Oh what happened to her?" "She left me when I went to prison."

"You had children?"

"One."

"It is so sad."

"Yah."

"You have very high tastes." She started again after some minutes of silence.

"I used to have, but now things have changed, seventeen hundred shillings per month isn't much," I lied. But now that she had made me feel important I decided to think of myself in that light.

"It's hard for you to recognize your own tastes. I saw you take hot drinks, you smoke expensive cigarettes, you have a gas lighter that's no doubt very expensive, and this watch you are putting on is of a millionaire's class."

This surprised me. Why had she gone to all that trouble. Or was she afraid I'd think of robbing her to satisfy my tastes. Was she finding reasons to sack me? She went on. "Really, the salary I am giving you is not enough for a man of your tastes."

"But I am not complaining. Are my tastes enough reason to sack me, madam?"

"I am not sacking you. I can't sack such a tough body guard." My heart started thumping heavily and loudly. What had got into this lady's mind? I wondered. What is to come next? I waited for a minute which seemed too long. Then she said, "I was thinking of a better job. My husband had a private detective agency which has not been operating for about one year now. I think with your past experiences, I mean the little I know, and what I have witnessed in the ring, you would run the agency very effectively. I've received so many letters from clients and this has been troubling me for some time. Don't you think you can handle that?"

"There's nothing I'd like better, but with my criminal record I don't think . . ."

"I can take care of the threat," she interrupted "Have you ever thought that money can buy anything?"

"I've never had such money so I cannot know, madam. I live in the class that has to kill itself in order to survive." She laughed though I didn't know why.

"It's a funny thing to say. How can you kill yourself in order to survive and how can you survive when you are dead, when you have killed yourself?"

"Madam, you cannot understand. Do you see these people we are passing along the road walking like they have no stamina

left in them?" She looked out of the window at people along the road, some waiting for the car to pass so that they would cross the road while others were carrying heavy loads which you didn't have to be told were composed of rejects from factories and other places. Then she turned to look at me for an explanation. I said, "They are all standing corpses. Some of them will tell you that if you gave them one thousand shillings, their problems would come to an end. And they'd be very serious about it. Just fancy what you can do with a thousand shillings to end your problems. And when do problems come to an end? It is not an easy thing to understand, madam." I could see my talk was holding her attention. She looked very confused, wanting me to continue and still not understanding. I drove on through two more minutes of silence. I could see she was deep in thought.

"What is your christian name? I am sorry to ask."

"Adams, but everybody calls me son of fate. S.O.F. in short."

"Thank you. S.O.F. why don't you write a book about all your experiences and with all that philosophy, I'm sure it'd educate many people on how to go about life. Millions of people would benefit from it and you'd also make money."

"Ma! ha! ha!" I couldn't help laughing and she looked at me in surprise. She'd never heard me laugh.

"What's so funny?" she asked.

"Tour ignorance, madam."

"Why don't you teach me please. It feels bad to be laughed at/

"I am sorry, madam. I am not laughing at you. I am laughing at the thought of making money out of a book. That is a dream. Who would read? On the other hand, the little money the book can fetch goes to the same people."

"Which same people?"

"The same people who have the money. The blessed few."

Can you imagine me opening a publishing firm with a salary of one thousand and seven hundred shillings?"

"You don't have to start a publishing firm. There are publishing firms all over the country. All you need is ^ write a manuscript and give it to them. They'll do the rest. All you do after that is wait for the royalties."

Tan, that's what I mean. I write a manuscript give it to the people with the money to publish it they give me ten per cent of the received price and they pocket the rest. That is minus the small discount they give to others who have money to keep bookshops. See what I mean? The shopkeeper gets thirty per cent, while the writer gets ten and the publisher with big money gets sixty per cent."

"Is that so? I've never thought about it."

"Yes, and that is the ignorance I talked about and laughed at. Then there's one thing you haven't considered - the millions of people you talked about. I've just shown you these people on the roadside. They don't know what they'll eat for supper and some don't even expect the supper. Where do they get the money to buy the books? Those who can afford to buy the book do not need to learn from my life experiences and what you call my philosophy won't mean anything to them. The millions would like to read alright but they cannot afford. What do you think I can do with ten percent. I am another standing corpse, the only difference being that I am a mobile corpse." She stared at me this time and seemed to be reflecting on life from a different perspective.

Then all of a sudden she asked me, "S.O.F. what would you do with

yourself if you got gooa money?"

"I don't think about dreams, madam. My thoughts right now cannot go beyond one thousand and seven hundred shillings. What you call good money is for Qod's chosen people," I said this to bring the boring talk to an end. The more I talked with her,

the more I felt vexed. But she was in a mood to talk and wasn't going to give me a break which I so longed for.

"What do you mean by Qod's chosen people? Are there such people really?"

"Have you ever read the Bible?" I asked as I turned the car to the small road leading to her home. I was glad we were home at last and I'd get the break.

"Yes, though not very much."

"You don't remember reading about Qod's chosen people? Also about sons of Qod and their difference from the sons of men?" She laughed.

"I have. Yes, I remember the sons of Qod marrying the daughters of men which is why Qod thought of destroying mankind during Noah's time." I parked the Benz at the front door, closer to the door than I ever went. I switched off the head lights, then put off the engine and sighed with relief.

"Yes," I said at last. "There are those sons and then the Qod's chosen. I don't happen to be one of either group." I got out of the car before her.

She called me back, "Adam we had a nice talk and it is not completed. Why don't you come to the sitting room and ..."

"Sorry, madam. I feel so tired after the kicks from that beast of a man. I need a hot bath then a rest. Just excuse me."

"It's understandable. Then maybe tomorrow we can talk?"

"Let's hope we shall see the day, madam. The way I live, I never believe about tomorrow. We shall see, madam. It would be a pleasure after all." Here she smiled and stepped out wishing me a good night for the first time since she employed me.

I unlocked my house humming the song 'I am in love with a DJ'. Why it had come to my mind I cannot tell because it had never been my favourite. I entered and went straight to the bedroom. I took off my jacket and hung it on the wall. I felt so

tired. Just as I had told Mrs Wicks, the kicks I had received weren't doing my body any good and I badly needed a hot bath.

I wanted to go to Eva and tell her to warm some water for me but the sight of the bed made me even more tired. I kicked off my shoes and lay there facing the ceiling. I lit a cigarette to give myself more comfort. As I continued smoking, I realised I was a bit tipsy. I had taken more whisky than I had thought. Could this be the reason why I had talked so much with my boss? I remembered some of the answers I gave to her questions and thought that such answers were a little too loose for a servant to give to his mistress. There came a knock at the door.

"Come in," I answered and jumped out of the bed. It could only be Eva. No one else ever came to my room. I met her at the sitting room and to my surprise she was carrying steaming water in a bucket.

"Hello! How did you know I needed hot water? In fact I was just feeling lazy to come and ask for some. What a good angel."

"I have just received a second surprise. It is the tigress who told me to bring some. And for your information I was told to do it in a hurry. In fact I thought you were dying."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"I don't know. You can guess. Please bath quickly, supper is ready."

I took less than ten minutes to bath. I sat in the sitting room waiting for Eva to come and at the same time feeling very hungry. Life had a meaning now. I had started thinking about a future with Eva as my wife. But if this happened, I promised myself Eva would no longer be a maid. I had started thinking of how she'd get a better job. The more we talked, the more I realised she was intelligent. I decided one day I would go to nation House Library and buy the issue which published their results. Somewhere in my heart I felt she had done better than she thought.

One day, when Mrs Wicks was going put with a friend and did not need me, I decided to check on the results. I now recalled the events that led me to discover her performance in her 'O' levels.

I bought the two and a half year old newspaper and went into the Benz. I checked the name of her school and got it. Then with my heart thumping heavily, I started reading the names, following each line with my forefinger and of course starting from below - fourth division. I checked through the fourth division column which had about ten people and her name was not there. I went up to the third division with about fifteen people and she wasn't there. The second division had about twelve people and here too her name wasn't there. I gave up then thought I was doing it in a hurry and with excitement. I started again. This time from division two downwards. I took time, reading each name loud enough for me to hear. But no way, she had failed. After all, the name Eva had engraved itself upon my mind and it wasn't easy to overlook it. With some kind of defeat and annoyance, I threw the paper down beside me and lit a cigarette. It doesn't matter. That does not mean she cannot join a secretarial training college, I concluded.

I took the newspaper again five minutes later with an intention of passing time. Then I thought I should note the passes in her school so that I could tell her when I returned home. I thought she would not want to know the detailed performance of her classmates. That, from my point of view would demoralize her, seeing how well those you used to know did while you were reduced to a house servant. The

figure was all she would want, I thought. I opened the page and started counting. Division one -1 followed each name to the end so as not to confuse the many names the candidates had given themselves. I reached the fifth name - Eva Kimenyi. I couldn't believe it. There had to be another Eva. 'But Eva W. - this is too

much of a coincidence/ I thought. I didn't know who Kimenyi was because her father died while she was only two, and the mother had gone also. I couldn't see which other man Eva would call herself after. I decided I had to know this from her.

I got out of the car and went to a telephone booth just opposite me. I waited while two ladies in the booth laughed at something someone on phone was telling them. I continued waiting, hating them for keeping me waiting for almost twenty minutes. They didn't care and didn't even seem to be in a hurry. I could see it was not costing them a single penny. There was no money being swallowed, shilling after the other as they continued talking, exchanging the phone between them. No doubt the man talking to them had been given the number of the booth and had called. Man! Oh man! You'll never learn, and don't tell me they were talking to another lady because I can't believe it.

They got out after thirty minutes. By then there was a long queue behind me. Everybody cursed, looking at the two ladies with hatred, but they didn't care. Why should they? I thought, with their bargain gone through? I took the receiver and dialed number 744600. Half a minute and the phone was picked.

"Hallo, this is Mrs Wicks residence."

"Thank you," I said. "Can I talk to Eva please, Eva Kimenyi." I had disguised my voice a bit.

I heard her hold her breath, then ask, "Who is that?"

"never mind who, it's a man with a message."

"Listen," she said and I sensed danger. "If you don't give me your

name I am going to hang up and forget anybody had called."

"I am the Son of Tate," I said and laughed. I was behaving like the ladies before me. Her laugh was even louder when she recognized mine. Then I asked, "Who's Kimenyi?"

"My father of course. Why?"

"I am coming right away." I hang up and went out. Those on

the queue congratulated me for hurrying up but like the women, I was not interested. I wanted to get home and deliver the good news to Eva. I was so happy.

I drove straight home. When she heard the car, she came to the front door. "You scared me so much. Where did you get that name from?" she asked.

I said, "Here," extending the two and a half year old newspaper. "If you are Eva W. Kimenyi then you got division one." For the first time, we got into each others arms and Kissed.

The next knock at the door told me supper was ready. I jumped to the door and opened. She was there alright, with the same tray I had got used to. I stood aside and she entered. I went straight to eating once the dish was put on the table. "No pretences this time, madam. You can think what you may about me but I am damn hungry." She laughed understanding what I meant. "Did you know I am being promoted?"

"Don't be funny, to a what? A senior chauffeur?"

"No, to a manager of a detective agency firm."

"Oh that, I have heard her talk about it several times with different visitors. She wants you to reopen it?"

"I think so. That's the job for me, Eva. Have you ever known I hate being idle?"

"Yes, you've told me that over ten times. The first time you told me that you helped me wash the dishes but the second time you told me, you were just seated there with all your clothes dirty. I thought it was such a contradiction."

I laughed, "You know, I have never cleaned my own clothes in my life? Well if that is to be the criterion then I am a lazy man. That job reminded me of the kids I was telling you about. I can make a good private eye out of these kids. I'll never leave those kids until they reform. What do you think about that?"

"I think you should eat, take a mug of milk, go to bed and rest. You have the whole of tomorrow to think. Your mind will be very fresh then."

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"I think you are right dear. Who knows whether she wasn't only pampering me to read my mind."

"That she can't do. Forget about the whole thing till tomorrow anyway. Just go and rest after supper. She wished me good night and closed the door behind her.

I woke up the following day at around 7.00 am. This was the first time for me to wake up that late. I had swallowed some sleeping tablets the previous night so I guessed they had caused this effect. In spite of this, I decided I'd still go for jogging. I put on my track suit and got out. When I opened the door, the three dogs were there, waiting for me just like any other morning. We took off immediately with the dogs on the lead. I had slightly changed the route to make it a kilometre longer. It had passed through a lonely place that looked deserted and which I always thought would be risky. I had used it for the past two months and seeing nothing happened, I had forgotten my first thoughts about the place. This time as I negotiated a corner, my three dogs over a hundred metres ahead, I saw two young men jump onto the road. Another one appeared from behind. They had let the dogs pass and I

was cornered, so I stopped.

"If you guys don't have a gun you had better not try anything. It's going to be too bad for all of us," I warned. I didn't panic though I was caught unawares. I felt so courageous. I was eager to see how they would start the fight, which would tell me the kind of opposition I was in for. I continued, "You guys must be funny at times. What would you expect a jogging person to carry in a track suit. I didn't come shopping."

"You have the track suit itself, a pair of shoes and a watch," one of the two answered. They didn't seem to be in a hurry, most likely because they were aware of the fact that we were far away from any kind of help I'd wish for. My three dogs were out of sight not knowing their master was in trouble.

"Okay," I said, "You can go ahead and get them gentlemen.

I hope you don't expect me to hand them over to you." I had by then turned aside and from the corner of my eye seen the third man coming closer. He was armed with an iron bar. The ones talking with me were not armed. I knew this kind of a game. The one from behind was the attacker. I could see they had suspected I had seen him and I knew what they would do to take all my attention till I got a bang at the back of my head, be unconscious and then be undressed. I had heard all those stories in gaol. There wasn't a single thing I didn't know about criminals, from the petty ones to the most infamous. The man now was about four metres away, one more step and then . . .

"Too bad man," I said as I hurled him in the air and landing on his accomplices.

The iron bar flew in the opposite direction when I missed to grab it. By the time two of them went down I was on the third one. I gave him an upward kick, connecting it with his chin very comfortably. He went down groaning with pain. As the other two got up from the ground with their crying of revenge, the dogs arrived. I had to laugh even in the midst of trouble. I kicked a dagger out of the hands of one, helped

him up as one of my dogs pulled him down.

"I told you guys not to start anything if you didn't have a gun. Do you now realize what I meant?" I gave him a blow jab just above the belly which I knew would bring breath out of his lungs. Some saliva leapt out of his open mouth to the ground. I pulled him away to the dogs. When I got ready to fight the third man, he took off. Ten steps and the dogs were on him. Within two minutes, all his clothes were in rags and over twenty tiny scars scattered all over his body. I looked at all of them lying flat on the ground where I was supposed to have lain unconscious and nude if they had got the better of me. I pitied them more than I loathed them. I could read poverty, hunger, want and desperation written on their faces. Funny enough, I even read honesty

which seemed almost erased by years of want. It'd have been advisable to call the police but I didn't. Instead I blamed myself for the damage I had done. I whistled and the dogs came. Then we resumed jogging.

I stopped running when I saw Mrs Wicks leaning against her Benz. I knew she would talk to me so I stopped. I saw her face become pale and the smile she had welcomed me with got swallowed up by the change of her face. She asked, "What is it?" What happened?"

I was surprised. I didn't know what to tell her because I couldn't get what she meant. Seeing I was confused, she touched her own face, a gesture meant for me to do the same. I did so with the back of my hand. I felt some sharp pain on the forehead. When I looked at my hand, it had some blood. I took out a handkerchief to clean the place. I was bleeding alright but I was not feeling it. I wiped the wound with the handkerchief till it got soaked. My track suit as well had dots of blood on the chest but most on my left shoulder. Seeing this was worrying my boss, I decided to give her the story.

"You must see a doctor," she said after hearing my story.

"What for madam? I am quite okay. I wasn't even feeling the scratch. I think it was caused by the iron bar. That was the only time I felt something sharp touch my face."

"Yes, that's why you must see a doctor. You'll get an injection against tetanus."

"Honestly madam that needle will do me more harm than this tiny scratch." I told her wishing she'd understand how I feared injections. But she insisted. I was to drive myself to town to get an injection. I agreed.

I was given the injection, the wound was cleaned and I was given some pain killers. I got out of the private hospital and went back to the car. As I opened the door, I saw a young parking boy, the size of Chali. I called him.

"How are you? Would you know two boys of your age, one called Mchacho and the other Chali?"

"tiao walimarwa." The street jargon again. I couldn't get it. I had started forgetting the little I had learned from my boys.

I just guessed what he said, then asked, "Wako wapU Kwa kisanga ganl?"

"Walimpora fara mwingine kijipouch halafu wakakataa kumkanjia chali mwingine walikuwa naye. tuyo chali alipomarwa akawasurrende. Wao ndiyo walijitupa, wangemkanjia huyo chali kwa maana yeye ndiye aliwapigia brake." I was getting on well now. My boys were in Industrial Area (Inda) Remand. They had snatched a pouch from a person and they had failed to give a share to a third accomplice who surrendered them to the police when he was arrested. My friend here was claiming that it was their fault that they were in remand because they ought to have given the third party a share.

"Get in here and let's go see them." I could see the boy was surprised and was at the same time fearing to enter into a Benz. This is caused by some inferiority complex. I persuaded him, made him feel important. He agreed and sat beside me. There was one thing he didn't know - that the Benz wasn't mine and that a few months earlier I was as desperate as he was, but that was one thing I wasn't going to

tell him. I drove to Industrial Area Prison, found a nice parking area and got out of the car. There were hundreds of people here who had gone to visit their people. It seemed most people go to see their friends on weekends. Seeing the number of visitors, I almost told my new friend that we should try the following day because we'd get time. But I fought against the thought and decided I was going to see the boys.

As I led the friend towards the prison officer who took names of the visitors, my friend told me, "Hapa mdoss unaweza kutoka saa kumi kabla hujawaona."

"Sasa tufanyeje?" I had a feeling he had an advice to give me. I wasn't very ignorant either. It was only that he didn't know.

"Kama unataka wafanye fasten mchoteeyule mbele."

"Sawa, na hawa wamejiandikisha majina gani hapa?"

"tiiyo ndiyo noma, huwezi ukajua choresha hivyo tu."

I waited until the officer had attended to some people we had arrived together with. I had a fifty shilling note in my hand. When I approached him I extended my hand like I wanted to shake hands with him. He felt the warmth of the note and snatched it the way a chameleon's tongue does to an insect. He put his hand in his trouser's pocket then got hold of his ball pen properly.

"Yes, whom do you want, sir?"

"Chali and Mchacho."

"Chali who?"

"I am afraid those are the only names I can give for the two boys."

"Okey, I'll see."

The officer left immediately. The tip I had given him activated him like an electric switch. He hadn't the vaguest idea as to the amount of

money I had given him. He hadn't checked so he wouldn't know whether it wasn't a wrapped paper. But he had not failed to note that I had just stepped out of a Benz and that alone was enough to tell him much.

My young friend turned to face me and asked, "Umemchotea ngapi?"

"Fifty shillings," I answered.

With a surprise he told me, "Umemchota fogo sana. tiata kumi ingetosha." It was a funny language and everytime the boy talked to me I answered with joy. To me he looked like he was an innocent young man, and if anything else, honest. But then, to me anybody who was suffering from want seemed honest and was poor because I believed that behind great riches there was a great degree of dishonesty.

As we waited, we got talking with my new friend. Unlike my two friends, Matawa, my new friend, wasn't a bastard. His parents were still alive. His blind mother married a street beggar some fifteen years ago. Matawa was born months later. He was given the name Matawa because he was born at the time the street lights were switched on. He had two brothers and a sister. They had never had a roof over their heads. His father had on several occasions erected a shanty in the town between shops and each time the shanty had been demolished by the city council cops, throwing the family out and into the back of a city council truck. His father had given up the idea of a shanty in town and had moved his family to the verandah. He had picked an area outside a photo studio, where the family met in the evening and dispersed early in the morning.

"I have stayed in 'missing line' for months myself," I told Matawa as he gave me his sad story. I wanted him to know that life could not be predicted and that he might one day change the course for his family. He couldn't believe it, no matter how convincing I tried to sound.

"Huko nikunienjoy mazee," he said at long last.

"When we meet our friends, ask them to tell you a little about me. Maybe that will make you change your mind," I told him. Then we were called to meet our friends. The tip had really worked wonders here like anywhere else. I mean, corruption.

Two dirty boys appeared from behind a door. Their long hair was shaggy and dirty. Everything they had on was dirty. But that didn't seem to worry them. They didn't seem to worry about the tattered clothes either. They were very happy especially when they recognized the smartly dressed man before them - me.

"We guessed it must be you. No one else on this earth can waste his minute to come and see us." Chali said before anything else. This made me feel I had done the best thing in a life time.

"Man, you look like you are living in a hole. What's the matter, and what's eating up your clothes?" I asked instead of greetings.

"This is the place they call hell, man. If anybody tells you there is another hell somewhere else, call him a dreamer," said Mchacho.

"When is the hearing of your case due?" I asked.

"September 12th."

"What do you mean? That's six months from now. They can't keep you that long."

"Man, we are lucky. There are guys here who have done five years in remand just because some witnesses don't turn up. We are lucky to do ours in ten months."

"How bad is the case? Do you think you need a lawyer?"

"No need. Our friend has agreed to plead guilty and have us released," Chali said. I dismissed them a bit to talk to the officer. I wanted to know whether there was a way in which I would help them. I was playing the fool as I knew everything, but I just wanted to know

whether he was the hostile type. He wasn't, so I gave him some two hundred shillings to give to the boys. A little more talk with the boys followed. I told them what happened at Rajiv's place, making them open their mouths and leave them agape. I promised to visit them again and wished them a good time. They didn't want good clothes. They argued it was unwise since they had a long time to stay in remand. I was to take them good clothes a week before the hearing date .

I dropped Matawa in town and gave him a hundred shillings. I had become father Christmas. I had heard him telling the boys how we had met and that we had a Benz waiting for us outside. On the way, he had told me more about my two friends. They always moved together and any other person who joined them would eventually complain about one thing or another. Mchacho and Chali were so dangerous and so hostile that other parking boys feared them. But they were generous when they had

money. After showing Matawa where he would get me during week days, I drove home .

For some reason, after the competition, Mrs Wicks had become very friendly and gave me some kind of freedom that didn't exist before then. I did not want to push this respect too far lest I lost it. I parked the car and went straight to report that I had come back.

Mrs Wicks was watching video when I entered the sitting room. She was watching a film of Sylvester Stallone which seemed to take all her attention. I found myself observing her more closely than I ever had. I noticed that she was also a very beautiful lady. She was an inch or two taller than Eva, a little darker but as well shaped as Eva. But she beat Eva with a few things; the way she dressed herself, her hair style and class. If Eva obtained these three things somehow, then Mrs Wicks would rate second.

She noticed me through the comers of her eyes and she faced me. She smiled - the first time I saw her smile since she employed me. I didn't smile back. I just looked at her, staring at the dimples on her fat

cheeks which were formed by the smile. 'If that's what attracted Mr Wick,' I thought, 'then he had good reasons to marry her.' I saw her stretch a bit backwards to reach a button on the wall. She pressed it. I thought she was putting off the video since she was not watching it any more. My entry had taken her interest, but instead of the video going off, I saw a door a few metres away open and Eva appear.

"Put that off," she commanded, then added, "Mind some coffee? Or what do you prefer?" she asked.

"Tea please."

Turning to Eva she said, "Okay make tea for both of us." I still had the hangover of the inferiority complex I had attained years back and being in such a big room, in fact being in this heaven with my employer left me wordless. There was no way I could

introduce a discussion. But I had promised myself one thing. If I was getting all this respect just because of beating an opponent by only a few points, then the next time I entered the ring I'd kill one.

"Did you get an injection?" she asked as I sat down.

"Yes, madam, a very painful one."

She smiled then said, "Anyone who saw you in the ring yesterday would not believe you can fear an injection."

"Yah but, madam, the problem here is you can't hit back. You just stand there and let someone else dig a needle into you helplessly."

She laughed and said, "But it takes only a few seconds."

"Yah, madam, but a second is too long, it can take a life." I argued as I stretched to take a photo album on a coffee table which was on my left. I saw Mrs Wicks was about to talk to me when the telephone rang. She stood up and went to answer it.

I opened the album and the first photograph which covered the first

page was of an old white man. He looked like he was doing eighty. Who could this be? Had I read about him in history? I stared at the picture again. I thought he looked like David Livingstone. I turned the page and forgot about whoever he used to be. The second page had a full picture of Mrs Wicks. She looked immaculate in a red dress and a shining necklace. The dimples revealed by her smile were very clear on the photograph and I stopped a bit to admire it. Then I turned over the page. David Livingstone and . . . Lol Mrs Wicks. I got the picture, my David Livingstone was none other than Mr Wicks. I felt so sorry, so disappointed and so loathsome. One would have understood clearly if Mr Wicks had taken Mrs Wicks as an adopted child, but for a wife, one would always doubt the two. But how could Mrs Wicks have taken such an old man for a husband? Love? I doubted. That kind of love wouldn't exist on earth. Then I remembered what she had asked me the previous day. "Have

you ever thought that money can buy anything?*" Now I realized what she meant. Money here had bought an old dying man a young beautiful lady. There was no doubt in me now that Mrs Wicks had married the 'junk' for money. I threw the album back on the coffee table. What I had learned was enough. I knew what kind of a lady Mrs Wicks was. Or was I jealous? Did I feel that Mrs Wicks shouldn't have belonged to her husband?

Eva brought tea just as Mrs Wicks put the receiver piece back on its cradle. She put the tray on the coffee table and left. Everything was there. Even some toasts. Mrs Wicks came back and served the two of us. "Welcome," she said and continued to take hers. Over tea, she opened up the previous topic.

"Let's get back to yesterday's discussion about the new job. You told me you'd like it better than anything else. That's so encouraging, now, do you know of anyway we can clean up the past?"

"Yes, there's a way. You just go to the CRO and ask for my record."

"What's that?"

"Criminal Registration Office. All you need is my number."

"Do you know it?"

"Yes." I gave it to her. Money could buy anything according to her. I wanted to see it buy me a licence to handle a gun. If it did that, then I'd never argue with Mrs Wicks on that point, I decided. At around 3.00 pm. that day, I drove her to the golf club. We left the club at 7.30 pm.

At around 9.30 pm Eva knocked at my door. I asked her to come in. I had not locked the door because I always locked it when going to bed which was normally at 11.30 pm. She'd never come to see me so late. She had brought me a glass of milk after supper and now she came with another. I thought it was an excuse to come and see me, but I didn't say so. She came and sat beside me, closer than we had ever been since we became

intimate. We used to talk about ourselves so much, but we had never made love of whatever kind. This time, after putting the milk on the coffee table in front of me, she put her hand on my thigh. I continued reading the newspapers in my hands without taking much interest. Then she reached for my left hand. She separated my fingers and put hers between mine. Both our hands clasped together. She started playing about with the hands and this time I looked at her.

"Hello, aren't you taking a risk? It's too late to have any of the millionairess' doors unlocked."

"AhI it doesn't matter. Have you noticed the changes?" she asked me.

"What changes? I don't know if I have," I said.

"Since yesterday. Between you and Mrs Wicks. You took tea and lunch together. That has never happened to any other employee here. What have you been talking about the whole day?" It was funny to hear Eva talk that way but I did not guess anything odd about it.

I answered, "Oh, I am sorry to have forgotten to tell you. Right now

you are looking at a private detective and of course the Directing Manager or is it Managing Director of Wicks and Wayne Detective Agency?"

"It is settled then?" she asked with some kind of excitement.

"Well, she said money can buy anything Eva. I want to see money buying me a licence to carry a gun."

"Is that all you think of?"

"Right now yes. What else is there to think about?."

"There's more in Mrs Wicks than the job only - you can't notice it yourself because you haven't been with her for long. I mean you haven't had a chance to see how she's treated everyone else. She served you with tea this morning, isn't it?"

"Yes, in fact I felt honoured."

"Yet you are a driver. Have you noticed how she's looking at you lately?"

"I haven't thought about that. Is there a change In that?"

"Addy," she called after a short silence. "She's in love with you. I see myself in the way and I'll soon loose my job." Mow I saw everything clearly.

This was why she had come. She was not certain of my deep love for her and jealousy showed clearly on her shy face. I felt bitterness inside my heart. I dropped the newspapers from my right hand, then released my left hand from hers. I got hold of her left shoulder, my hand passing on her back and pulled her to me. I looked at her straight in the eyes and said, "If she does that, we both go. And no matter what kind of an agreement there might be, I'll just break the contract and go with you."

I saw drops of tears fall from her eyes. I bent a little and for the first

time, I kissed her hungrily. I should have known this before. That women like being reassured every now and then. She put her head on my chest, her hair brushing against my mouth and the whole face. I smelled the rich perfume she had probably borrowed from the millionairess.

"Eva," I called. She looked up, still leaning against my chest. "Did you notice anything about our names?"

With a smile and her left hand on my left cheek, she said, "Yes, the very first day you told me your christian name."

"That's good. Adam and Eve. All we need to look for now is our Garden of Eden. And we shall soon find it." I kissed her again. This time her hands reached for the back of my neck. After some three to five minutes, she released me.

"Addy, I am assured now. I was afraid of losing you." She picked the mug of milk and gave me as she would a child. I took it from her hand and my left hand left her shoulder.

"Alright," I answered, "but never do that again in future. "I saw her face turn dark with some kind of guilt and not knowing exactly what mistake she had done.

She asked, "Never do what again S.O.F.?"

"never doubt me again. This is one miracle that has happened to me which I never ever dreamt of."

"What miracle? I don't understand please."

"Falling in love." I told her.

"You make me feel guilty of. . ."

"No." I interrupted and said, "On the contrary you should feel great for rehabilitating a beast, taming a wild lion. I have lived long enough in a place where love is drained out of human beings and hatred and loath

is injected into the veins. But this is one lesson you cannot understand. Just know that you have done what millions have failed to do."

She smiled, "I feel so happy dear. I wish you'd understand how serious I am about the issue."

"Now go and lock up the doors to my boss' house or I go and continue with my body guarding. I have a feeling she wouldn't object." She stood up, pulled me towards her and kissed my left cheek lightly.

"I wish you know how right you are about that. Good night."

She closed the door lightly behind herself. I suddenly felt lonely. I jumped to the door and opened it. I was just in time to see her back as she turned right to get to the kitchen door, the three dogs following her, wagging their tails. I too closed the door and locked it. I turned and went to where my mug of milk was. I took it then took my cigarettes from the coffee table. I went to my bedroom to rest and think. There was much to think about now. The future had started showing some meaning to me. There was Eva to think about and our Garden of Eden. I had to plan about all this - the future.

Chapter Five

The table clock struck 6.00 am sharp. I woke up without any hurry. I took a cigarette and lit it then stepped out of the bed. The night had been wonderful since not a single dream had interrupted my sleep. I had spent two good hours thinking about what Eva had told me and the more I did, the more I got confused. I didn't want to admit that her suspicion about our boss was true. What was of great importance to me was that Eva had accepted me whole-heartedly and I loved her. Son of a b*tch was at last in love, that is if love was feeling some fondness for somebody of a different sex. That *s how I felt. I was longing to have Eva rest her head on my chest again, her hair brushing on my face and her perfume penetrating my nostrils. I had those thoughts in mind when I reached the bathroom where there was a mirror. I was surprised to see an image of a smiling person - me. I brushed my teeth in a hurry and went back to the bedroom. I put on the track suit,

changed the slippers and put on my track boots. It was getting to 6.20 am the time I normally took off for jogging. I had previously thought of giving it up for a week after I had gone through the tournament but this morning I changed my mind. That was being lazy and I didn't want to be. I did seventy five press-ups and got up. I opened the door knowing too well that my three friends were eagerly waiting for me. I knew there was something unusual when I opened the door and the dogs weren't around. Normally they would be scratching the door immediately I touched the handle. They appeared ten seconds later. By then I had opened the door wide and had stepped out. I pulled the door and closed it behind me, ready to take off. I turned left and saw Mrs Wicks.

"Good morning, sorry for interrupting. Mind if I join you for the jogging?" I wasn't surprised at all. I began admiring her the moment I saw her structure. She had a complete track suit. The top fitted her perfectly, giving her breasts good room to protrude at ninety degrees. The pair of trousers which fitted her well completed the picture of the most beautiful lady I had ever set my eyes on. I mean in a track suit if not in trousers. If all women looked this way in trousers, then I'd have to change my mind about them. I had hated women in trousers until then.

"Morning, madam. I don't mind. In fact I'll feel honoured," I answered meaning every word of it. Which man on earth wouldn't feel proud to have a most beautiful lady beside him even if it is for a few metres' walk?

"Are you ready, madam?" I asked as she set her watch maybe to time how long it would take us.

"Oh yes, I am quite okay." She smiled to confirm to me that she knew what she was doing and that I should not worry. We took off. I was a step ahead of her up to the gate. The dogs were about thirty metres ahead by the time we passed the gate. About fifty metres away, I slowed down to get in step with my boss.

"My dogs here can take you round the route we follow and home again.

They lead me throughout," I said preferring some talk to the silence. When she didn't answer, though it wasn't a question, I thought she preferred silence so I held my tongue. It also reminded me that she was my boss and that I should wait until she volunteered to talk.

We jogged on with Mrs Wicks regulating my speed. From the way she controlled her steps, I could tell this wasn't her first time to be on the road jogging. Every time I turned my head a little to look at her, she gave me a smile which made me do it more times than necessary, just to see those dimples which formed on her beautiful cheeks. I wished they were on Eva, who would give me a chance to kiss them the way I pleased.

"Am I holding you back? It is long since I jogged," she asked after we had gone for about a kilometre. Her breath up to now had not given any signs of tiredness. She was still consistent.

"not at all, madam. In fact you are very good. I did not expect you to cover such a distance before you ask for help." This was a disguised way of telling her to ask for help any moment she felt the need. A few metres from there, I felt her hand reaching for mine. I took it. I moved a bit faster and she complied. I knew then we would do it in good time. 'What would Eva think if she saw us running hand in hand,' I wondered. I had just remembered her previous night's suspicion. She was wrong, I thought.

We jogged hand in hand for over a kilometre with none of us talking. We arrived near where I was ambushed by the gangsters and was about to show her the exact point when I saw her suddenly weaken. She cried "Oouu!" I stopped and grabbed her. It looked funny to me, but I kept silent. Whom could I tell anyway. She seemed strong one moment and the next she was as weak as a one year old child. This wasn't normal to me.

I pulled her closer to me in order to support her as she looked like she was falling to the ground. Her response to this surprised me. All of a sudden she felt very strong as she supported herself on my shoulders with her two arms around my neck.

"I am sorry dear. I kind of felt dizzy and uncertain..." I noted the word 'dear.' Was it by some kind of a mistake that she used the word or was it just as she would use the word to refer to a pet? Was I imagining things, going too far into thinking whatever Mrs Wicks did was suspicious like Eva had said, or was I dreaming after all?

"Take it easy, madam, you'll be alright in a minute. You need to lie down a bit and . . ."

"Mo, no, no! I am alright where I am. Don't bother much. I only hope I am not tiring you." She held to me firmly like a child would to show you she intended to stay where she was.

"Certainly not, madam. Just relax/ I said.

I didn't know what else to do. I just stood there looking stupid and feeling likewise. You need not take chances with a beautiful millionairess who happened to be your boss and who would reduce you to zero if she felt like it. The thought of 'missing line', Harambee Lodgings, Mathare Valley, written off minibus, roasting maize and not forgetting pulling wagons up and down the hill wasn't the best image as I flashed back into my life. One needed to be completely abnormal to forget that and try to take chances with his boss, male or female.

But still in this position, I couldn't fail to notice certain things. I noted that Mrs Wicks had 'collapsed' almost on the spot where the bandits had attacked me, and just as the dogs had done that day, they had come back running to see what was happening to their master. Being unable to decide whom to help this time, they decided to move a few steps away and sit watching us.

Then, I noted that Mrs Wicks head was resting on the same spot Eva's head rested last night. Was this some coincidence? Her hair brushed my face as she moved her head to one side so as to look up to my eyes. Now the scent of her perfume hit my nostrils. It was rich, very rich. It completely erased Eva's perfume which had lingered on me since last night. I turned my head to look at her. Our eyes met and they seemed to share some concealed secret. She smiled, this time shyly. My eyes

searched for her dimples. One was hidden against my chest but the other was very clear. I admired it secretly. I had a feeling that this lady was all mine right now, but I wasn't going to take the risk. That was one gamble I wasn't going to take. But it wasn't to take long before I saw the green light. Mrs Wicks brought her mouth closer to mine, her breath mixing with mine, feeling warm. Her lips, soft delicate lips, touched mine.

She said, "Wamathina, you are a nice man. No one has held me this way for years." I felt her arms tighten their grip and pull

me closer to her. "Please feel free with me. You are such a good person."

In the five minutes that followed, none of us could support the other and we consequently found ourselves rolling on the ground holding each other excitedly. For how long we were on the ground, I couldn't tell but it must have been for sometime.

"Wow! Wow! Wow!" That brought us back to reality. It was one of the dogs barking. When we sat up and saw how the dogs were watching us, we burst into laughter. It made us feel shy even with the knowledge that dogs wouldn't understand. I got to my feet and gave Mrs Wicks a hand. Before we took off I grabbed her again. This time I wanted to feel her breasts squeezing against my chest, just for the record in my life.

I pushed her from me a bit to look at her dimples. I commented about them and felt each with my tongue. I would always remember that, I promised myself. She gave me a light kiss on my left cheek and we took off. She hadn't collapsed after all, she had only picked a lonely place to 'ambush' Wamathina -just like the bandits had.

"Do you love Eva?" We were about three hundred metres to getting home, still hand in hand. The question took me by surprise. Why bring Eva between us from the blues.

"I don't know. That's an honest answer," I lied. I loved Eva.

"You are very honest, Wamathina. That I believe. But she loves you. I can tell you that. She has gained morale since you came here. She does her work so well, willingly and happily. I mean, she has become so good."

"Is that to my credit?" I asked. She looked at me, smiled shyly and squeezed my fingers. That was the answer as far as she was concerned. If it was a yes or a no I never knew.

We slowed our speed as we went down hill to the bungalow. Our hands were now disentangled. We stopped outside the garage. It was approaching 7.30 am. I normally got back a few

minutes to seven. Mrs Wicks looked at her watch and told me she'd have forty five minutes of rest and we would leave at 8.30 am. As she turned to go, I noticed the back of her track suit was moist and had some traces of mud too. Her hair could easily tell that it had been tampered with. That was my doing. I stood where I was, enjoying the swinging of her hips and thinking that all that flesh had been at my disposal only a few minutes ago. She closed the door behind her, the door to 'heaven'. I looked at myself to see if I had such traces of mud - yes I had - on my knees.

I caught the movement of the curtain by sheer luck. It was the servant quarter to the right of the bungalow. Somebody had been watching us very closely. Since I came to this place, I had never given it a thought that there lived somebody in that house. Such things didn't interest me though I was a curious person. The way things easily crumbled in the past had made me wary. But I decided to check who this person was. Could it be Eva? I doubted and certainly it was not the guard. Then I remembered Bakari the gardener. I had forgotten all about that chatter-box. So that is where he stayed? How often had he caught me doing things, things which are not necessarily bad but which one ought not do in the open? Like kissing Eva goodnight, admiring Mrs Wicks secretly swinging her hips and buttocks, Mrs Wicks' track suit being moist and muddy and the like.

I didn't have to go to see him. I was positive it was him. He was the

only person who would have that kind of behaviour among us. Going to him now would only give him a closer view of my moist track suit and the mud at the knees would definitely give us away. I turned and got to my room. Who cared about a person who talked for the sake of it. He hadn't expected me to take a month as Mrs Wicks' driver yet I was getting to half a year now.

I pushed the door to my servant quarter and went straight to

the bathroom. My mind was thinking hard. How could a thing like this happen? Would it really be true that this millionairess had fallen in love with me? Could that be what people called love or was it a chance she had taken to just satisfy some of her emotions which she felt required some kind of satisfaction. I mean some kind of satisfaction that could only be known to herself. I had heard of some people masturbating. Could this be it? In which case it would mean she had used me as an object. I imagined her lying on the road with me on top of her, kissing her hungrily. Then I remembered a point where she grabbed me so tightly till I almost lost my breath and I heard her breath change and become heavy. She then uttered inaudible words which I thought were meant to thank me. It was like she had reached some kind of a peak, was this when she reached her cli . . . " I cut it short and got out of the bathroom still asking myself endless questions which had no answers. I had not bothered using the towel I was holding in my hands to cover my groin. I felt there was no point as I was all alone. As I got to the sitting room to go to my bedroom, the door was pushed open. Eva entered with a tray carrying my breakfast.

"Ooh ! Christ! I am so sorry," she banged the door with her foot to close it before she put the tray on the coffee table. By then I had wrapped the towel round my waist.

"You shouldn't get embarrassed, Eva. I am all yours. This is the kind of transparency we need as true lovers." I said as I approached her.

But I knew, what had surprised her wasn't finding me nude. There was one part of my body which must have shocked her. While I was imagining myself on top of Mrs Wicks on the lonely road, my penis

had erected and was stretching eight inches in front of me and even the towel would not hold it back.

"Don't come near me please," she joked covering her face with both hands to avoid seeing my erection. I got hold of her but she resisted, accusing me of bad manners.

"Why do you look so guilty?" she asked taking me by surprise. Why are women always so suspicious and correct almost all the time? I wondered. Since I had denied loving Eva when I was asked by Mrs Wicks, I felt guilty. I shouldn't have denied the truth. Right now in front of her I remembered that about half an hour ago, I and Mrs Wicks had sinned, a thing I was sure would never ever be taken lightly by Eva if she happened to know. Having no answer to her difficult question I decided to play deaf, kissed her and entered the bedroom whistling, "I've been thinking about you..."

I opened the left rear door of the Benz when she was a few metres away. She got straight in and thanked me as she entered.

"Thank you. Police Headquarters, please." I climbed the stiff hill at a high speed. I had a jolly mood this morning which was unusual. Good mood in the morning resulted to grief in the evening. I left my boss at the Police Headquarters.

I picked her from Criminal Registration Office at precisely 12.30 pm. She sat beside me instead of her usual place. As per her instructions, I drove straight to Continental House.

"Find a parking somewhere here. The office is in this building," she told me.

I didn't have to struggle. I saw an Indian get into his car and I decided to give him a minute to see what he was up to. Then I saw the reverse lights and I knew he was getting out. I reversed to give him enough reversing space. I parked as he left.

I followed my boss to the lifts. After two minutes' wait lift number

three indicated QF.

"6th floor," she told me.

I pressed the button. Immediately you left the lift you saw a signboard showing 'WICKS fir WYPiE DETECTIVE AQENCY.' We turned right as the arrow had indicated. My heart beat had now increased and was quite fast. I didn't quite believe that this was happening to me. Who would believe it. From a shoe-shiner,

wagon pusher, watchman and lately handcuffs to an office in the posh Continental Mouse. I followed my boss.

She pushed in door number 601 without knocking. Once inside she stood aside and invited me. On entering the red carpeted office - the reception, I saw two ladies standing. Each had a typewriter on their desks and one had a telephone switchboard. Mrs Wicks didn't talk to them but turned right and pushed the door written 'MD' on. I followed her there. It didn't feel good to pass people and fail to appreciate their respect of standing up but I decided to put off the courtesy and do it the way my boss did since she knew better. Maybe when I am on my own it would be different but right then I was a blind man .

This office was vacant. But the way it was furnished told you that it belonged to a millionaire. The red carpet was the same with the one in the reception area but no doubt heavier. Behind an executive meru-oak desk, there was a swing chair which was covered with maroon velvet. In front of the desk, there were two armchairs facing each other. At one corner to the right as you entered this office, there were six seats arranged in a way which told you whoever owned this office held conferences either with his subordinates or his 'VIP' visitors. I followed my boss who went straight to the swing chair and invited me to the armchairs.

"How do you like this office?" she asked as she picked the phone and pressed a button.

"It's posh. I've never entered such an office." I said honestly.

She smiled then talked on phone. "Is Mr Simpson in office? Okay, call my office," she said then put the receiver down and looked at me.

"If you were serious about this job then here is your office."

I swallowed the surprise. I was aware that my inferiority complex still lingered in me. When would it end? Not even after getting such a hot kiss this morning from this millionairess? Or was I after all born inferior? Was there such a class from birth? It was difficult to know. But time would tell, I consoled myself.

After Mrs Wicks had talked with someone in her office which was in Cooperative House where I normally drove her in the morning, she turned her attention to me.

"I managed everything for you. Just as I had told you, money can buy anything. You are now as clean as you were before you involved yourself with the gang. I learnt everything in that office. I am so happy about you Wamathina because you are very honest." She touched her chest with her left hand and continued, "God, I hope you'll not be influenced by anything on this earth to go back to crime. Please for my sake." This surprised me. She looked like she would weep. "Please tell me you won't, promise me."

"I promise you I won't. I wish you understand madam. I have been with you for about six months now and that is good time for you to have known me, at least to learn what kind of a person I am. It's poverty that had influenced me. I am no longer poor."

"I wish I do, Wamathina, and I wish it were possible."

"What do you mean, madam?" she smiled before answering.

"It is not easy. It might take years and still be impossible."

"I still don't understand please."

"It's simple, Wamathina. It is simply difficult to understand you. Here

is a person who is to me so honest and whom even the commissioner of police describes as most dangerous. In fact one of those big boys he summoned to his office used the words cautious, ruthless character, but seemingly harmless which makes him all the more dangerous. Imagine that. They made me feel like a criminal too. In fact I couldn't believe I was listening to someone talking about the same person I was jogging with this morning."

Why don't you say I kissed this morning, I thought. I could notice shyness on her face. It was as if she was regretting having done that to me. It looked like from now on it would be strictly business - master and servant. Maybe this is why she hadn't

talked to me all the way from the CRO to this office. I decided to take care as far as I was concerned.

"But madam, I had told you all about myself and I didn't omit much. You have to know those boys must exaggerate so that you may know what they are doing for you is not a simple thing. In fact most ..."

"Okay, okay," she interrupted. " They might have exaggerated but the fact remains they were talking about things connected to the kind of life you have passed through. I mean they wouldn't have associated such issues with a person who has never been on that side of the law. However it is my sincere hope that you have changed. I do not know the reason but I strongly believe you have and that out of you will once come a mighty person. I mean, kind of a great person with great popularity and great admiration from people of all walks of life. I would be very proud of a thing like tnat Wamathina. I would like to live to that day and I would love more than anything else to see you turning my great hopes, expectations and prayers to reality."

Tor about a minute we remained in silence. Each was lost in deep meditation. What Mrs Wicks had said took me by surprise. She never appeared to me as a person who cared about anything in the future. She had everything I'd dream of and was getting richer every minute that ticked by. Mr Wicks, whoever he was, had built an empire for her, an empire not anything near Maxwell's but one which was certainly

there to stay. So to her. the future was just a matter of ushering into each day more riches than the previous one. I could not then imagine her thinking of seeing another person's success in future let alone caring about it. Then there was the manner in which she had delivered her advice. Her choice of words portrayed a well educated person, a person who knew too well what she was talking about and meant it. What kept me silent was the thought

of the answer she expected me to give. Her concern for me, if that was what it was, left several questions in my mind unanswered. This reminded me of that morning. The jogging and the fainting which wasn't real and which ended in one long kiss at a very lonely place and on wet ground at the centre of the road.

"I am so grateful about your concern,' I said at long last. "I think I have never had anybody in my life who has ever expressed her good wishes to me like you have done. If my only duty is to do my job well which I can see you are placing in my hands and avoiding what I'd call ugly temptations, then I promise you, madam, that you'll get perfection out of me, no doubt about that." Again we became quiet. I didn't know what to say. What I had said was from the bottom of my heart. What else, anyway, would I have needed. Mrs Wicks had picked me from the streets. I was no better than the street children, I mean the guys we call parking boys, and she had placed me right at the top of life. What else could I yearn for. I had even got what I'd never dreamt of - a kiss from her.

"Is there anything you'd like to know about your new job?"

"Yes. I have a few questions."

"You were a journalist a few years back. Did I mention to you that when I learnt this from you I went and looked for the magazine you were working for and got all your work? Even, what you were doing as a freelance. Wamathina, I can tell you that you are talented. Your humour column was so popular. I can tell you people miss it even today. I have always wanted to ask you what happened? Why did you give up writing? forgive me for getting out of the main topic but I was

reminded of this by your answer just now. I am worried that you were a journalist since you might ask questions I wouldn't be able to answer. You'll have to ask what you think I am capable of answering considering that I have never ran this office. I hope you understand please."

"I understand, madam. I wouldn't go out of what I'd expect you to know. In fact I am asking so that I shouldn't go out of bounds. As for why I stopped writing that is a long story. It needs two good hours to narrate the events. There's no one on this earth who yearns to write like I do. But whenever I remember what they did to me in Myayo House to convince me to give up writing, my blood freezes almost causing a heart failure. Imagine they almost castrated me. They used a woman to tie my balls with a plastic rubber and pull them . . ." I realized I was carried away by the sad story and was talking too much when I heard Mrs Wicks hold her breath and I saw her hand move fast to cover her mouth in shock.

"I am sorry, madam, I am so sorry. Whenever I remember that part of my life I forget myself and start talking dirty without realizing it. It was a bad experience. I shouldn't have used ..."

"no please. It is what they did to you that shocked me. I cannot imagine a lady doing that. I hope you did not get hurt, I mean they didn't spoil you." I knew what she meant. She was wondering whether I wasn't castrated.

"Well, I have yet to prove that, madam. I haven't had any chance to. From the slaughter house they sent me to prison. After prison it was to find my wife gone and to be welcomed to innumerable problems. I have never had enough rest ever since. If anything, it is these six months I have been with you that put some morale in me. I cannot thank you enough Mrs Wicks for what you've done to my life. God knows I owe you more than I can afford to pay you and this is why I have to do your work well. Anyone joking about with you is as well joking with me and that's not welcome. If you can remember the very first day I entered your sitting room and you instructed me to call your former driver, you may get the picture of what I mean. Everybody I

met sympathized with me when they heard I was your new driver. Some predicted the best I would do was two weeks. I have done

six months and I feel like I haven't even started. Your place is heaven to me Mrs Wicks but I just know you cannot understand what I mean.*

She took out her handkerchief and wiped some drops of tears that had started flowing down her delicate cheeks. She looked at me the way a caring mother would look at her ailing child, seeing the child suffer while there's nothing she can do about it. I couldn't be able to meet her eyes. I took a desk calendar and started reading meaningless dates just to avoid her pitying eyes. Why did women always weep whenever I gave them just a portion of my life story. Was my life so piteous? I wondered.

"Wamathina, * she called after a while, "promise to tell me the whole story one day. It is a favour I am asking from you. Will you?"

"You cannot stomach the story, madam. It is dirty and very painful even to the listener. It will only hurt your feelings and probably create a wider gap between me and you. Please let us forget about it. What sounds funny to me in the story has made you shed tears. What if I really told you about the most difficult instances?"

"I insist. I am asking you for a favour, Wamathina. Just say yes and I'll organize when I'll be ready to listen. Will you?"

"If you insist, I cannot see myself denying you anything you want from me. I will tell you everything you want to know. Maybe it will even make you understand what our leaders do secretly and deny publicly."

"Thank you. I will listen to the story over the weekend. Have you ever told anybody else the story?"

"never. Whom would I have told and why?"

"Are you sure? You haven't told Eva anything about yourself. You want

to say I'll be the first person to listen to the story?"

'Eva again' I thought. Why bring Eva whenever we got deep into talks, I wondered. Was I missing something?

"You'll be the first person to listen to the story coming from me that day." I twisted the statement to avoid telling a lie. I had told Eva everything. She was entitled to know everything about me because she was my most close friend at present and future wife whom I'd love to the very end. And to close up the chapter, the only person I should and must be transparent to. Mrs Wicks reached for my hand which was now resting on the table and held it.

"Wamathina, when you have told me the story for which I feel honoured, I am sure you'll get it out of your mind. It bothers you because you have never told anybody. You are kind of a lonely person but when you share what you have with those you can trust, you will find that you are no longer lonely. I want you to tell me the story under pleasant circumstances where you will not feel lonely. This weekend will be okay with me. What was it you wanted to know about this office?"

"Who is Wayne?"

"He used to be my husband's associate. He passed away before my husband."

"Who took over in his place?"

"It is only the name that remains. He had sold his shares to my husband long before he passed away."

"Immediately you take over there'll be only your job with the ones of the staff you'll pick. I can recommend two for you who were operating here before we closed. But that is entirely for you to decide."

We left the office a few minutes past two. The two secretaries were coming back from lunch. They were briefed of the new developments

so that they could transfer their work to Mrs Wicks' office. When I went back to the office I would be the new boss.

What we had not discussed up to now was my recent job. Who was to take over and what were her plans about a new driver? Would she cope with another driver? That remained to be seen.

We drove straight home. She was sitting beside me in the front seat. We discussed the tournament which was being organized for December 12th in which we would both take part. She said she had great hopes that I would emerge the best to which I said I would do my best. Here again Eva was brought into the subject.

"I hope this time you don't need Eva to cheer you. You have gained many friends. You have every member in our club on your side."

"Eva has to be there, madam. Her presence makes me kick out like a mule," I said truthfully. Why should I always lie whenever Eva was mentioned. She looked directly at my face. She looked very calm, not surprised by the fact that I had admitted I'd request her housegirl to accompany me.

She chuckled a little and said, "You know, Wamathina, I have never come across a person who is half as frank as you are. I like you for your honesty. It is so good to be principled. No one who knows you well would doubt what you say. You make sure your No goes for No and your Yes for Yes. I wish I would be like you in this case. Most of us are spoiled by wanting to please everybody. We do not want to give a point blank No for an answer. Not even when we know it is the No which is required."

"I find it easier that way. I was taught by my grandfather." I had mentioned this to her before and just told her now for the sake of something to say after all her praises.

After some silence she talked again. "I want you to spend tomorrow preparing yourself for a long trip. Pack some clothes and whatever else you think you need. We might take a few days off to go on business.

When we come back you'll take over your new job. You have so many clients waiting for you."

"Tomorrow is Friday, madam."

"Yes I know. We will leave in the evening."

"What will be our destination?"

"Coast Province. Have you ever been there for a holiday?"

"I have never had time for a holiday in my life. I went there twice on duty. I stayed for nine days on both occasions."

"How did you like the province, especially Nombasa?"

"When you are on duty it is just like any other place. Worse still you have to work under a hot atmosphere which you are not used to."

"You might think differently this time because you don't have much to do. What was your business last time."

"Covering a story. It is over ten years back."

"What was the story about?"

"Murder."

"Christ! Whose murder?"

"A prostitute's murder." She looked at me surprised.

"How did you fit in? I think I don't understand."

"But you must have read about it. Who didn't. The murder of a lady in a Mombasa bar by an American jannie."

"Oh! Mjeri. The one who was inserted a broken bottle. She had three children."

"Aha!"

"I don't seem to remember what happened in the long run. But I do vaguely remember this matter being discussed in Parliament. Was it you who covered the story? Christ! What happened eventually?"

"Another long story, madam, and if you don't want me to drive right under that approaching Kenya Bus don't ask me to tell you." She looked at me, fear written all her face. Then she seemed to relax all of a sudden. We had passed the bus.

"Wamathina," she put her hand on my thigh, "you will tell me everything when time comes. I will want to know everything which makes you sad when you remember."

'When will this be and who tells her that I'll be willing to do it.' I thought as I slowed down to let another driver pass so that

I would get into the road leading to 'heaven'.

"Are we going out again?" I asked. I had never asked her this question since she employed me. Right now I felt sudden tiredness, boredom and reluctance to do anything that would come my way. I wanted to rest, I wanted to go and lie on the bed and face the ceiling and think. Something was disturbing me. There were signals of danger which I couldn't grasp, leaving me completely confused. What would this be? Why would this feeling come back to me after such a long time of rest and happiness? I remembered the accomplice who used to give me danger signals. Where did he go? Or was he the one reappearing? Was there something wrong?"

"What is it, Wamathina? You look like you have swallowed a bee. Pull aside and stop. You look like you are going to faint." I regained my senses.

"Sorry, I'll be alright." I relaxed almost immediately.

"What was it?"

"I don't know. I just felt dizzy and weak."

"You need some rest."

"You are right, madam." I replied, I really needed some rest.

"I can guess what happened. I have made you remember so many things today which you'd like to bury deep in the ground. I have ignorantly revived them, making you flash back to your unfavourable days. I am sorry for doing this to you Wamathina. I promise to make you forget all your unhappy days in future. Please forgive my curiosity. I shouldn't have pushed you ..."

"I'll be alright, madam, I think you are right but you shouldn't blame yourself. It is my fault for being a weak person. I should learn to be brave. "

"Nobody would expect you to be better than you are. From the little I have learnt about you Wamathina, I can assure you there are very few men who can survive such a callous path to freedom. I think this is why they call you son of fate." We arrived home half a minute later.

"Do you think you'll be in a position to drive this evening?"

"Oh yes. I'll have relaxed. I recover very quickly."

"Okay, I want us to go to the club this evening at six. Have a nice rest. Again she looked at me the way a mother would look at her sick child. I could almost feel her concern. For the first time I also felt deep concern for her. I liked her for being so good to me. I'd do anything for her, I promised myself.

I saw the curtain in my bedroom being drawn a little and then closed instantly. I knew there was somebody in my bedroom who had heard our arrival and wanted to ascertain our identity. It could only be Eva. I looked to see whether Mrs Wicks had seen it then realized that all her concern was on me. She went straight to 'heaven.' I turned and went to my room. The door was not locked.

"Hello!" I said to Eva who was now on her way out. I held her and kissed her. I held her so tight until she complained. I felt I wanted her, not sexually but to feel her presence. I wanted her to stay with me. I was afraid of being left on my own then.

"Eva, please stay with me."

"You know I cannot do that, dear. What is the matter? You don't look yourself. Has the tigress vexed you?"

"Mo, in fact she's been very good to me. I want to talk to you, Eva. Can you get time?"

"I'll organize. Please let me go before she goes to the kitchen and finds I am not there." I gave her another kiss to which she responded positively then pushed me away. She gave me a slight slap on the left cheek and told me she'd come back. I went straight to my bedroom, threw the shoes on the ground, climbed onto bed and after lighting a cigarette, lay comfortably facing the ceiling - thinking.

"Don't move," the hush voice of a police chief inspector said. "Stay as you are. Raise your hands slowly above your head and let them stay there like they are frozen." Four other police

officers who had emerged like ghosts from nowhere started laughing hysterically.

Tou thought you had made it?" one of them said and they all burst into laughter. This time even the chief inspector joined in the fun. I started trembling. I knew now it was really the end of me. I begged them to let me call Mrs Wicks but they refused and as an answer I was given a slap by one who I recognized to be a sergeant.

"Ha! Ha . . ." they all laughed again.

"Please Inspector tell Eva you are going with me. Tell her I have been picked for unknown reasons and tell her where you are taking me."

The kick I got this time made me run mad. I got hold of the officer's right foot as he tried to kick my bowels again. I twisted the leg and threw him up towards the inspector. They both went to the front as they struggled to wake up: I rushed to the door and opened it. The inspector squeezed the trigger. He hit one of his officers in the belly just as he was about to get hold of me. I reached out and started running. I was now running towards the gate hoping that the watchman would open immediately he saw me. As I neared him, I saw he had a gun in his hand, pointed right at me.

"Freeze, Son of Fate. You cannot win all the time." I looked closer and realized it wasn't the guard. It was another police officer who had taken charge of the gate. The guard was bundled up in a corner in his entry box. I looked back and saw the inspector and three others running after me. I knew they'd shoot me immediately they spotted me, to avenge their dead accomplice.

I dashed out and hit the hand holding the gun. This took the cop by surprise. Before he knew what had hit him, I gave him a flash-kick on the chin sending him down like a log. I got hold of his gun and jumped out to the road. I lay flat behind a thick bush

to wait for those pursuing me. The first to emerge was the inspector. I pulled the trigger, aiming at his wide chest and he went down. I aimed at the one behind him who was now on his knees taking cover. I pulled the trigger once again. The click from my gun told me I had spent all the ammunition it had. I was cornered. The cops on realizing this stood up covering me with three guns and from the back I saw headlights of a police 999 again. Son of fate, you are sunk - leaked for good.

Someone touched me. I woke up with a start, suppressing an urge to hit out before screaming.

"Christr Eva said. "You look like a ghost. Mas some invisible demon been strangling you?"

"What a funny thing to say," I thought as I sat up, happy to realize that

it was only a dream and that I was in the safest hands on earth - those of my lover.

"Come and take lunch. Don't tell me you've been asleep. It is only fifteen minutes since I was here."

"I had one hell of a dream. I would give out anything I owe than have such a dream again."

"Can you give me away?" She looked at me straight in the eyes frowning.

"I don't know. Honestly speaking that would be to me, what they call a devil's alternative. Let's not imagine it anyway."

"Have a look at yourself in the mirror and you'll wonder why anyone would still be in love with you. Have you ever seen Bogi Benda's face when he has a hangover?"

"no."

"Too unfortunate, dear. You'd have got a better picture of what you look like if you don't want to face the mirror."

"Tell me before I forget," I demanded.

"Yes?"

"Who's this Bogi Benda and where on earth were you with him and what the hell makes you think I ought to know him and

lastly, of all the people in this world why did you think of comparing me with this man? Where does he live?"

Her laughter made me know I had made a fool of myself. That had to be the only reason. I was to know days later that Bog! Benda was just a character in a cartoon. Who said I should know everything which goes on in the papers anyway?

"Has the tigress told you to pack a few things for her?"

"Why? Mo. She doesn't ask me to pack anything for her even when she's going for a trip."

"Does she normally go?"

"At least once a year. She didn't go anywhere last year and she hasn't gone this year."

"Well she told me to pack a few things. We shall leave for Mombasa tomorrow evening. A business trip to the coast. That's what she called it." I saw her face turn darker. She didn't welcome the news just like I hadn't. The thought that I had to be separated from her for even one day was hurting and I think it was the same with her.

"That woman is a demon. Why does she want to take you somewhere alone? Where nobody else knows what you are to her? Why can't she use the same means as before?"

"What means?" I asked surprised by her comments.

"She used to go by air. After all, I had heard her say she sold up the business in Mombasa which is why she doesn't need to go there anymore. It's over two years since she was there last. Why the sudden change?" She sat beside me on the bed. "Adams, I don't like that. It is a plot."

"What do you mean by that? Do you really know what the word 'plot' stands for when put that way?"

"Yes I do. Do you want me to tell you. It means - a secret plan, most likely sinister. It's a conspiracy in other words."

"Ok. I agree, you do. But what would she be plotting for? Me?"

"How I wish, dear, you had a good experience with women as you have on other things. How many times do I have to tell you that I

don't like the way she talks about you. She tells me so many good things about you. I have never heard her praise anybody else not even her tycoon visitors who do not come these days. She went as far as asking me whether I, too think you are good and whether I like you. She also asked whether you have ever attempted to give me a date since the day we were at the club. Why do you think she asks me all these questions?" I was as surprised as I was shocked.

"What were your answers and why haven't you told me before?"

"Take care of yourself, dear. That's all I can tell you. What you told me last time convinced me you can be trusted. You are a good man, at least to me. I'll pack for you tomorrow."

Women, I thought. In most cases they are right but they are too suspicious of each other. Why would Mrs Wicks take the trouble of a trip to Mombasa just to have me on my own? She didn't seem to me like a person who'd encourage such trash. It is true that she showed much interest when I got what I'd term a nervous break down but that would be the case with any other person who has human feelings.

Why was Eva so suspicious anyway? nothing! There's nothing to it. She was being unfair to Mrs Wicks who had proved to be so humane. I wished she'd taken time to try and understand Mrs Wicks. Why did they all mistake her for a cruel lady, Calling her tigress didn't mean that was what she was. It was just a name which originated the first day I came to this home. As far as I was concerned there was nothing to take care of in as far as Mrs Wicks was concerned. She had everything in life. All she was doing then was to be kind to a person she realized needed sympathy, a person who most likely would have ended up in a pit if she hadn't needed a driver badly. That was all as far as I was concerned.

Friday morning! I didn't go for jogging. I decided to rest. I left the bed at 8.30 am when Eva's knock sounded for the third time. I'd have preferred to do without breakfast than wake up earlier than this. As Eva put the tray on the coffee table, I went straight into the bathroom. Fifteen minutes later I was out all dressed and ready to face the day

ahead.

I lay on the garden chair outside the bungalow with a novel I had selected from a heap of books which had been thrown in the store. This was the same garden chair on which I had lain on the very First day when I came to look for a job and where Mrs Wicks had found me.

As I turned a new page, I swung my head to see what I had noticed through the corners of my eyes. It was Eva. She was carrying a beautiful briefcase of medium size. I hadn't seen one like it before though I had set my feet on many places in my life. This one had to be something special. Putting it straight, it was of the millionaire's class. She stopped when she reached where I was.

"I was instructed to give you this so that you may do your packing. Put it on your bed, I'll do the packing for you in forty-five minutes time." She went back to her 'office.'

I entered 'heaven' at precisely 2.00 pm. I called D.T. Dobbie to enquire about the car and was told it would be ready by 3.00 pm. I went back to my house where Eva was packing for me. I felt bad to see her packing, knowing that we would be separated indefinitely.

Something strange got into me. It had never happened in my life. I felt I should engage this lady somehow. What was the best way to do it? Take her by the legs and shoulders and put her on the bed and have sex with her for the first time? Every time I thought of sex with Eva I flinched. Why not wait till time gave us the best opportunity when we'd do it freely without worrying that a boss somewhere might press a bell to call either of us. We would then be forced to terminate our love making abruptly.

On the way back from D.T. Dobbie where I had taken the Benz for service, I visited a jewellery shop on Kenyatta Avenue. The owner of the shop could see me clearly as I parked the sleek vehicle and locked it then headed for his shop. The securicor guard stationed at the door stood aside and saluted. The Indian owner of the shop came to meet me, extending his hands to receive mine which I took with dignity.

Man, I'll never know what is so wrong with money or why money is so powerful. Money works miracles. Just because the Indian thought I owned the Benz, it was enough to have him accord all the honours to me.

"Can I be of service to you, sir?"

"I want a ring, a nice one - but not a very expensive one," I added with a touch of humour. He took me straight to where the rings were .

"I hope you won't have any problem about the size. Is it for you or your wife? If it is an engagement ring, I just have the right thing for you." That pleased me. He knew exactly what I wanted whereas I didn't. I decided to do it his way. He looked experienced.

"You are quite right. My size will fit her wonderfully." He picked one, the very one which had caught my eye. From the way it was packed, you didn't need to ask in order to know that when the price was announced you'd start looking for another one. It fitted me so well. He gave me the case in which the ring was. There was a tiny label with the price in shillings, five thousand five hundred, 'fixed prices' I read on a sign board on the glass shelf. I took the ring out and handed it over to the Indian. There was no point of being like women when they are shopping for Christmas dresses.

"This one is okay. I'll take it." I took out a cheque book and gave him a cheque. The first cheque I had ever written out. It was interesting having me in a position to give out a cheque of five thousand five hundred within six months, some of which was

spent living in a written off minibus. This was incredible. Had my star shone? Was this what grandma talked about? There was no other way my star would shine. This was it I thought.

I put the cheque book back in my pocket. I knew that I had drained the account but I didn't need money at this stage and I still had a joint account with Eva.

The Indian handed me the case and the receipt as he thanked me. He escorted me to the door where again the guard stood aside and saluted. If you told the Indian that I didn't own the Benz and that I was only a driver just like those he had employed, he wouldn't have believed you.

I was excited as I drove home. I wanted to surprise Eva. She'd know she meant everything to me, that she was my only hope in life and that besides her there was no other.

I found Mrs Wicks sitting outside on a rocking chair which I had not seen before. She was swinging backwards and forward. She was so lost in the rocking that she only realized I had arrived when I banged the door of the Benz. She stopped rocking and lay comfortably on her back. I went closer to her.

"The car is perfect. They gave it a thorough service/ I said. Then I remembered her Royal Card which had paid for the service and I gave it to her. How the rich live! You only produce a tiny card and you are given services worth thousands of shillings.

"We have two hours to go. Please prepare yourself. Did I give you the code number of your briefcase?"

"What code number?" I asked ignorantly. To be honest I didn't know what she meant. I had never seen a case like it before. But luckily, for me, she probably thought it was one of my rare jokes. She went ahead and gave me the number.

"One-two-one, two pushes right and left then press the open button."

I swallowed all that. It was physics to me which I knew nothing about but since I wasn't such a big muggins I would follow her instructions and see the results. I went straight to my room.

I stretched myself on the bed while my mind now relaxed. What I wanted right now was to see Eva and see her reaction when I gave her the costly engagement ring. She wasn't to know what I was giving her until she opened the case. Then I'd personally take the ring and put it on her finger. Five thousand five hundred shillings on one finger - a real engagement, I thought.

"Are you dreaming again, dear?" I hadn't heard her enter.

"no. Why? Was I screaming?"

"No. You were talking. In fact I thought you were two."

"Did you get what I said? I must have been talking to you."

"Not fully. It was something you were presenting to someone. A pledge on something or ... I don't really know."

"Okay, I understand now. It was some kind of a rehearsal. Here, get this golden case. It is a present for you." I gave her the case. I watched her every movement. The first thing she did was to take the case and look at it, eyes wide open with excitement. Then she sat on the bed and finally she opened the case and started kissing me wildly.

When she was through, she let me go and we sat down. Her legs were now on the bed. She again admired the case then the ring without touching it. I took it from her and gave her the case back after taking out the beautiful golden ring.

I took her ring finger and announced, "You are now duly engaged. You belong to only one man on this earth, Adams Wamathina-me. Whenever you look at that ring, remember you belong to a very jealous gentleman but a most loving one. May Qod help you to be faithful all your life no matter what problems you encounter in life." I let her hand go. The ring fitted as if made to measure. She looked at it without moving her eyes from it. I guess, she was praying so I gave her time. Then I realized I was

wrong. When I looked at her, she was weeping. Not again . . . I thought and got hold of her. Now she wept loudly.

When she recovered, I kissed her goodbye. I knew we wouldn't get any other chance. We wished each other all the sweet things and she went out. I turned my attention to the briefcase and felt like weeping.

"You are very smart, Wamathina. You look terribly good. Those were the first words of Mrs Wicks when she met me opening the boot of the Benz to put my briefcase. I turned to face her. I almost told her the choice of my clothes was made by Eva.

"Thank you, madam. You look your best today. Let me help you with your suitcase."

"I see, thanks. How was the day?"

"Swell. I am wholly recovered."

"That's good news. Are you all set for the journey?"

"Oh yes."

We took off at precisely 5.45 pm. Everybody, including the chatterbox was outside to see us off. I glanced at Eva who was waving good bye and I waved back. Mrs Wicks who was besides me was also waving excitedly. I hooted as I passed the guard, for greetings. He too waved goodbye. We both waved back and soon got out of his sight.

My first stop out of town was at a petrol station. We filled the tank, had the attendants check whatever else was necessary after which we took Mombasa Road. By the time darkness closed in on us, we had done over a hundred kilometres.

I was in a jolly mood which made Mrs Wicks comment. I answered all questions that she asked me joyfully with plenty of humour such that every ten minutes she had something to laugh about. We did not behave like master and servant but rather like old friends. I went as far as commenting about her perfume which made the car in which we were feel like heaven. I was enjoying the journey alright.

We did not get into Voi town. We passed through as we both felt okay. There weren't many vehicles on the road which is why Mrs Wicks had preferred to move at night. We made good progress as a result.

About seventy kilometres from Voi, I saw some reflectors of a vehicle which appeared to be out of the road. I was travelling at about 100 Kph. I reduced the speed by half and as I neared, I knew I was right. The vehicle, a brand new Pajero, had rolled several times out of the road into a bushy area. It had cleared the bushes as it rolled to where it was stopped by a big shrub. I stepped on the brake pedal and pulled off the road.

"You want to get out dear? This place is damn dangerous.' I didn't fail to notice the name dear and her concern even under the circumstances.

"Yes," I said. "Can't you see this vehicle hasn't been here for long. Let's just check around and if we can't help, we move on."

I took a torch I had in the dash board. I could see Mrs Wicks was busy looking for something from one of the suitcases we had put on the back seat. As I got out, she called, "Wamathina, here - get this." I couldn't believe my eyes. She was holding a gun, a 3.8 automatic pistol. She too had a torch which was more powerful than mine.

"This is the most risky area between Nairobi and Mombasa. Qangsters ambush travellers here. I'll come with you. I can't remain in the car alone." I didn't object since with her beside me, I'd feel braver. I corked the gun and went ahead.

"Uuuuu!" The loud scream almost stopped me dead. I rushed and held Mrs Wicks just as she was about to fall to the ground. Her torch was directed right opposite where I was standing but since she was now in a state of fainting, it didn't spot what had shocked her. I took her torch and flashed it directly opposite where we were standing, with Mrs Wicks resting her head on my chest.

"Swallowed, it has swallowed him. It's only the head ..." she was muttering in a voice which was partly inaudible. Then I spotted the shocking image. A python had swallowed a man halfway. It had gone as far as the waist.

"He is not dead. We must help him. We cannot allow this to happen. Please pull yourself together."

"What will you do? Shoot it?"

"Mo. That would put both of us into trouble. Just get back to the car and leave this to me." She complied. We went to the Benz and I took a cloth which I used to clean the vehicle with. I then opened the boot of the car. From experience, I used to have five litres of petrol stocked in the boot in a plastic five litre container. I took it out and opened the lid. I dipped the cloth in until it was wholly soaked. My idea was to throw the soaked rag at the tail of the python then light fire hoping that when I did so, it would withdraw and run away from the fire. But when I threw the rag, it landed right on its mouth. Wow I couldn't light the fire because it would consume the python's prey as well - the person we intended to save.

"That wasn't my idea," I was telling Mrs Wicks. But before I laid my plan down for her, the python was already withdrawing, from the way it was doing it, we could guess it was badly affected. I got ready now. I'd shoot it immediately it vomited the victim's legs.

Boom! Boom! I released two bullets, remembering my dream the previous day. This was what I had seen. The python, whose head I had shot twice, jumped madly. It coiled and uncoiled, two, three times then it lay still - dead.

"Wonderful! You are a wonderful man, just great, you are all mine. I swear you are mine son of fate!" That was Mrs Wicks in dreamland. Dreaming that I was wonderful, a great man and all hers. The thought made me chuckle. But I was to know later that she wasn't dreaming but seriously meant every word of it.

"What do we do now, S.O.F.?"

"Get the body to the hospital. He is unconscious, not dead and I have a feeling he was aware he was being swallowed alive. This hand was trying to reach for a weapon- that thick stick about five inches from his

right hands. It must have been terrible. Just take the torch and I'll hold him around the shoulders and pull him to the car. You cannot touch the part which was swallowed with bare hands. These animals have poisonous saliva.'

After placing him comfortably on the back seat I took the torch and went back to the scene. I wanted to make sure we weren't leaving someone else behind. The Pajero was empty and there was nobody else at the scene. I went back behind the wheel to try and see If we could save this life.

"Reduce the speed a little, dear. You are moving at almost 200 Kph at night." I didn't argue. You don't argue with facts. I was not aware I was speeding. I reduced to 110 Kph.

"That's better dear, I was worried,"she told me.

"Well, I don't argue about facts. You'd be surprised to learn that I wasn't aware I was speeding."

"But you are a good driver all the same. In fact the best I have known."

"But you don't know many, madam."

"Please before I forget, drop that name once and for all. It makes me feel guilty. I do not want to hear it where we are going and never again after."

"Which name, madam?" I asked having not understood.

"The names you call me bore me. Can I give you a name to be calling me?" I now understood.

"Yes please, and I am sorry for having bored you for such a long time. You are such a patient person." I felt so sorry.

"S.O.r. are you being sarcastic?" I felt like I had been stung by a bee on the eye. I almost lost control of the car and had stepped on the brakes by reflex, then pulled off the road.

"Christ! What's it, dear?*" The screeching of the tyres had warned her of danger. She looked at me, put her hand on my thigh and asked me again.

"What happened? What were you avoiding?"

"Nobody- nothing. It was you. You have offended me for the first time and I am very sorry about it, forgive me please." She was surprised. Her face turned so pale that I was touched. She put her hands on her chest to express herself more clearly.

"Me, offending you? If I did, Qod help me. I haven't the vaguest idea how I did that and I wouldn't dare do it." The way she was looking at me made me feel really sorry. I blamed myself for my crazy behaviour. I had to explain so that we'd both regain our earlier good mood.

"I am sorry. When you implied that I was being sarcastic, I felt like I had been stabbed. I lost control of the car forcing me to brake and stop. Imagining that I can ever be sarcastic to you would be a sin by itself. I had talked so sincerely and I am feeling so sorry that all this time I have been calling you boring names which you put up with. Maybe I misunderstood what you said and I am sorry. I am very sorry Mrs Wicks and up to now I do not know what to call you. Have I made myself clear please?"

I wanted to hold her so as to console her because that is normally the simplest way to console a worried lady, but for two things I wouldn't. One, the fact that she was my boss though I could guess she wouldn't have minded and secondly, which was most vital, was the fear that in doing this I would be offending Eva. Anything I was sure Eva wouldn't like me doing, I wouldn't dare touch. But I could see from my explanation we had understood each other. It was quite clear to me as well as to her that when she talked of me being sarcastic she didn't mean it but thought she was being more free with me and would like me to be with her.

"I am relieved and happy and sorry at the same time. I

shouldn't have said that. It just occurred to me that I have never told you my names. At the same time I hate you addressing me as madam. I understand why but I do not like it coming from you. Anybody else is alright but not you. Frankly speaking, when we are only the two of us which is so often I don't like being called Mrs Wicks. You have taught me to be frank and honest and that's why I am being so open. Do you want to know my names?"

"Certainly. It will be very interesting."

"Do you think so? Interesting to you? I'll be happy." We were now speeding towards the nearest hospital. The tense atmosphere between us had vanished .

"Mary? Jane? Rahev? Julian? Rose? Mercy? Catherine? Hellen? Have I called you. I can almost swear I have. I can't get it wrong as you look one of those." She broke to peals of laughter which impressed me. She didn't know I was only being funny.

Tou make me look like a fool," I added increasing her laughter.

"You've never been so wrong. With the confidence you had when calling all those names, I couldn't help laughing. I am Janet."

"Wanjiru," I said in a hurry. It was a wild guess intended to be funny, but I was correct.

"Who told you that one?"

"Just my guess. You look a Wanjiru. Most Janets are. You mean I am correct or you want to make me look a fool for a second time?"

"You are right and I am surprised because it was easier to guess the first one. I am not used to the name Wanjiru even on my papers which you've probably come across." And that took care of that. I was at liberty to call her either Janet or Wanjiru but never madam or Mrs Wicks. 'Why? Why this, Son of Tate? Remember what Eva told you last night? 'How I wish dear you had good experience with women as you

have with other

things.' It started dawning to me that Eva must have Known what she was talking about.

"Where are we taking him. A private hospital don't you think would suit him better?*

Tan, it would. No doubt this one is a tycoon. What a daring python! Trying to swallow a tycoon. Mo wonder it didn't survive."

Mrs Wicks chuckled. "Don't make me laugh where I should be weeping. Mow was the animal to know it had a tycoon for supper?"

"Mot supper. That wasn't super. After him it'd have gone for a good week without the need for more food. It was just a rich dish. What a pity!"

'MOST URQENT CASES ONLY' the signboard read. We drove there and before we stopped, the rear doors of our vehicle were opened by nurses who had emerged pushing a stretcher. That is how good they are in Aga Khan Hospital.

We followed them to the reception. I took out his wallet to check his names and I got his passport.

name: Mohammed Aslam bin Aslam. Sex: Male. Date of Birth: 2nd December 1940. Nationality: Kenyan

Everything was in order and duly taken care of. However I did not fail to note that it was 2nd December 1991. Exactly 51 years since his birth. Aslam was just about to celebrate his fifty-first birthday in a python's belly. Unconsciousness in a hospital was a better option.

"Give us your name and address please." A nurse was talking to me holding a note book and a pen. She was also smiling which was expected of her.

"Adams Wamathina, alias Son of Fate." She looked at me just as I had

expected. I was used to it.

"Excuse me, Mr and Mrs Adams Wamathina?"

I hesitated. It looked odd somehow but explaining that I was a driver would have been stupid.

"What? Of course. What else would you expect?" Mrs Wicks intercepted. I was just about to give a yes. But why be so harsh to a friendly nurse who was just trying to be good, I wondered.

"I am sorry madam, it is just routine." Women know how to handle each other. I had never seen Mrs Wicks become so happy like this time.

"I am sorry too. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. It is this accident. I wish you saw him halfway swallowed. My husband took a few snaps of the incident. I wouldn't like to see them in my life." The nurse had not heard about the story of the man being halfway swallowed. Mrs Wicks explained to the shocked nurse.

"Your address please," the nurse asked again.

"We'll be staying at Diani Beach," Mrs 'Adams' answered.

"Oh, I wish you a very nice holiday. I wish all people were such good Samaritans."

We arrived at Diani Beach Hotel at 2.00 am. We were helped to carry our luggage to the reception. On entering the lobby I went straight to the toilets. I had started sweating and wanted to do something about it.

When I got out of 'gents' ten minutes later, Mrs Wicks was not around. At the desk the receptionist asked "Mr Adams, sir?" I nodded. "Third floor please. Suite number 305. It is facing the beach. One of our best suites, sir."

"Thank you," I said.

"Want an escort to show you up?"

"Mo, thanks." I went to the lift.

I tried the handle of door number 305. It was locked. I felt like a fool. Why didn't I ask for the keys? I asked myself. Then I thought Mrs Wicks might have taken them for me. But what number was her suite? I wondered. I decided to try suite 304, the one next to mine. As I turned to move, the door to my suite opened.

What I saw activated my mind. I started seeing things from Eva's point of view. I remembered yet another thing she had said which then to me seemed uncalled for. 'Why does she want to get you alone? Where nobody else knows what you are to her?' What a funny thing! Now it no longer seemed funny but interesting - very interesting. Janet Wanjiru alias Mrs Wicks was standing at the door with only a brassier and underpants. The smile, the dimples on her cheeks and the black eyes were irresistible. I smiled back.

"Hello dear, please come in. I have just taken a shower." I entered, but by then all my common senses had failed me. I was like a robot. Oh! How I hated this! She got hold of me, pulled me to her chest to let the beautiful pointed tits rub against my chest. Then she held my head straight and kissed me on the mouth.

"I told you, you are all mine. Every bit of you belongs to me darling, I swear I love you. No more pretences now. I have to tell you. I have to be frank and honest like my teacher." She touched my chin with her soft hand. Her eyes made me shy. I could see she understood it.

"Don't be afraid of me, dear. Please, I am a woman just like any other. I can understand you so well. After all your problems you wouldn't expect a person like me to appear in your life. But you are wrong and I wish you'd understand. To me you are the most admirable person I have ever met. I can tell you truthfully that I have never loved somebody else. Yes, if we have to take the word love seriously I am very right. If it is strong and irresistible fondness and kind feelings

toward someone else then I really do. I know it will take you time before you take me seriously but I'll be patient. This is why I decided we go for a holiday. I wanted to be with you on an island of our own, where we would be alone without being lonely."

I remembered Eva's words again. How right she was !

After closing the door and locking it, Mrs Wicks led me to the bedroom. I did not notice what was in the resting room. I saw nothing. I was so astounded to notice anything but follow my captor's instructions.

"Take a shower first. I am sure you feel like it." She took a towel and extended it to me. I could see it was not mine although she had opened my briefcase and arranged my clothes in the open wardrobe. The one she was giving me was the one she had just used .

I undressed and wrapped the towel round my waist. I took about five minutes in the bathroom. Later, I sat on the bed, not sure of the next step. Most of the residents in this hotel were already asleep. It was past 2.00 am. Mrs Wicks entered from the sitting room as I went to fetch another underwear. She did it for me.

"Do you feel like taking something?" she asked me with her hand resting on my head. She was treating me like a child by giving me all that motherly care.

"Something like?" I asked not knowing what choices were available.

"Whisky or a cup of hot something. I can make it for you."

"I'd prefer some whisky but not very strong."

As she left, I became conscious of things that I had missed. I hadn't had time to have a good look at her waist neither had I cast a glance at the thighs and the legs down to the toes. When I did, sitting on the divan bed, my heart beats became heavy which normally happened

when I was frightened or highly excited. The excitement now was the realization that I was looking at a structure which was Qod's own doing. This was what he really wanted a woman to look like - the definition of beauty.

When she brought the whisky, I realized I did not need it. What I needed now was some rest, some good sleep so that I would be able to cope with work the following day. As it was right now, with my heartbeats so heavy and my stomach filled with

noise as a result of worrying and getting shocks, it was impossible even to judge what was good or bad.

I took the whisky because I had asked for it and I did not want to disappoint Mrs Wicks. It was not as dilute as I would have liked it but I went ahead and swallowed the way you'd take a glass of bitter medicine. I put the glass on the bedside locker and stretched on the bed wondering whether that was the right thing to do.

Five minutes later, Mrs Wicks joined me and immediately she settled beside me, I started hearing the heartbeats - my own heartbeats. I hated myself for this.

"Darling! Are you still not ready to accept me. Don't you really believe me? I swear if you don't take me, I'll have to commit suicide." I remembered the gun. I opened the drawer to see whether it was still there. When I saw it, I felt some relief. She wouldn't commit suicide without first killing me. Christ! Would she kill me really? Just when I was engaged to the most beautiful young girl in the city? What would happen to her? Who would she marry and what would happen to my engagement ring? Would she first throw it away? Oh my talisman, my grandma's beautiful gift, what is all this? I touched it and then Mrs Wicks seemed to notice it for the first time.

"What is that?" she held it and brought her head closer to observe it. "Where did you get it from. It is very beautiful and interesting. Is it a traditional something?"

"Yah, my grandmother gave it to me. Can you believe my grandmother stayed with it for over a hundred years." I was telling the story with great excitement. It surprised me how I soon forgot the problems facing me.

"A hundred years? How would she know that, or she ..."

"No. Don't guess. When my grandmother died, she was over a hundred and thirty years old. Believe it or not but she proved it to me. She was given this thing by my great grandfather the day

she married my grandfather." She was now very close to me. She put her right leg on me and her left hand behind my neck, then bent and kissed me.

"You have very interesting stories, dear. I wish you did what I had told you months back."

"What was that? I don't think I remember."

"I had proposed that you write a book based on your life experiences and all you have encountered. It would be very interesting."

Now, as I lay facing the ceiling, with her right leg resting on my two legs and her left hand under my neck, her other hand caressing me, I thought she was right. Who would believe a thing like this would happen. She kissed me again.

"Don't you agree with me, dear? I read quite a lot and I know what I am talking about. I have listened to your story and compared it with the fiction stories I have read. Yours would be stranger than fiction."

"I agree with you. Being a writer wouldn't be any problem, but tell me,"

"Yes?"

"Would you mind if I put you right at the centre of the narration?"

She laughed shyly, then said, "I do not know, mmm, what exactly would you insert about me?"

"Well, what can I tell you now. Okay, let's say all that took place from the very first day we met to the moment I'll be completing the book." She seemed to think I was trying her or trying to see how serious she was about me. She made up her mind.

"But I don't mind. I am not ashamed of you darling. I am even ready to marry you. I swear I am." What else would I say. Again Eva came into my mind. 'How is she now? I'll have to call her first thing in the morning.' She turned my head to face her.

"Stop thinking so deeply. What is bothering you dear? Aren't you happy with me?" She got hold of me and turned my whole body. She did it easily. We lay on our sides facing each other but with her hands around my neck. She later took off her bra to expose tits which were so tempting. I found my hand caressing them. I was finished and she had control over me. Then my whole body started demanding for her love. I remembered that for about fifteen years I hadn't had any sexual affair. I had forgotten all about it. It had even lost meaning to me. Now I was aroused. I needed it more badly than I ever wanted it. She realized it, reached for the bed switch and put off the light. She switched on another one which lit up just where we were, under a mosquito net. She pulled off my underwear which I allowed, then she took off hers. I got on top of her. A beautiful millionairess under me on a comfortable bed under the roof of Diani Beach Hotel after fifteen years of sexual starvation.

She yelled on and on, calling me sweet names and promising me the world as we made love while reaching climax quite often. We both needed each other. Within one hour we were both exhausted and in dreamland.

I woke up in the morning to find myself on top of Mrs Wicks. I couldn't remember a thing that had happened the previous night or how I had got on top of her. As I stepped out to reach for my watch, she too woke up. She got hold of me. "What is it? Where are you

going?"

"My watch. What happened last night? I got drunk, didn't I? What brand of whisky did you give me last night?" I could see she wasn't amused by that.

"What do you mean? That I did it with sinister motives?"

"Oh my Qod! Mo. Why do you want to vex me in the morning? All I said was that I got drunk. What is wrong with ..."

"I am sorry I misunderstood you, dear. Please don't be so harsh. Can't you see I am dying for you?" She held me and pulled

me to her. I let her do it. Later I jumped out of the bed. I felt so weak but relieved of a great burden.

In the sitting room, I took the phone and told the operator to give me Nairobi 744605. I wanted to keep my promise - to call Eva. I felt guilty. I had wronged her but I wasn't intending to tell her so. I had decided to hide my guilt behind drunkenness. I saw Mrs Wicks get into the toilet as the operator called to tell me I was through.

"Hello, is that Eva?"

"Yes."

"Eva, sasa?"

"Fiti, tlabari ya coast?"

"Mjoto tu. Tulifika salama."

"That's good news."

"Have you known for how long you'll be away?"

"Mo, she hasn't told me. I'll let you know as soon as I have learnt of it. I miss you dearly."

"Me too. Are you in the same hotel with her?"

"Yes." I decided to change the subject before she asked me more questions in connection with Mrs Wicks. I was afraid if she asked me more, I would end up telling her lies and loathed doing it to such an honest girl who would never dream of being unfaithful to me.

"Have you thrown my ring away?" I teased.

"Can you imagine me doing that? It is part of me now."

"Ok, that's good news. Well, let me prepare myself for the day. I'll call you again today or tomorrow morning."

"Andy,"

"Yes, dear,"

"Take care of yourself please. I don't trust that woman."

"Me too, I'll take care. Bye."

"Whom were you talking to?" I turned to see Mrs Wicks just behind me, obviously listening to my answers. From the look on

her face I could tell she knew it was another woman I was talking to. Jealousy was written all over her face. I decided to confuse her so I got hold of her and picked her up with one hand on her back near the shoulders and the other on her legs. I took her to the bed.

"What's bothering my Janet now? Can't I call a friend?"

"Who was that you called your dear? I must know."

"Forget about that. Tell me, dear, did you see my track suit when you unpacked?"

"Yah, do you want to start jogging?"

"Yes, I want us to start. We have only three weeks. Remember the tournament will be on the 31st of this month. Which track suit did I bring?" By now I had calmed her down and she was near the wardrobe. But while trying to make her forget her question, I had opened another line which now brought trouble.

"There's something you must tell me. Who packed for you?"

"Why? I did it."

"Mo, you didn't. I am sure of that. You do not even know what was packed and what wasn't." How right she was!

"Mow who else would pack for me anyway?"

"It must be Eva. I am quite sure and she must be the one you have just been calling. You must tell me or I'll find out soon."

"Janet, you have spoilt my good mood. I am not happy."

"I know you do not want ..." she started crying. I got hold of her.

"Why do you want to spoil our holiday, dear? Why did you bring me here if you did not want me to be happy? You prepare a very nice dish then you spoil it. What do you want me to do?" I put her on the bed and lay beside her. I turned her face and with the back of my hand I wiped her tears. I then held the back of her head and kissed her. Tears were still flowing but the more I cleaned her the more the flow became endless.

"You must tell me. . ." she muttered and again started crying loudly this time.

"What do you want me to do?" I asked her. I was very confused.

"You just tell me the truth."

"About what? Eva? Yes, she packed for me. Is there anything wrong with that? Tell me."

"Is she the one you were talking to?"

"Okay, yes. She has been very good to me since I came to your place and I owe her so much in my life. You can understand, Janet. Who thought you'd take a person like me and give him all the freedom that he can wish for. I had Eva, who was easily available and who I wouldn't fear. As far as I was concerned, you were my boss, my mistress and you are aware of the way I executed my duties."

"For how long have you been lovers with Eva? Does she spend nights at your place?"

"You are the first woman I have spent a night with or even shared the same bed with for fifteen years. It was you who reminded me sex still existed. Believe it or not." She sat up and got hold of me with both hands. She pulled me towards her.

"Thank you, I know you have told me the truth. I am so happy, dear. I wish you knew how I feel right now after hearing that story. I can tell you that I too have not slept with any other man for over fifteen years. I will tell you a story which you'll find difficult to believe. Wicks wasn't my husband. He was my father. He adopted me at the age of fifteen. I was then in secondary school. At the beginning he was sponsoring my education, then he decided to adopt me after some recommendation from our headmaster. At the age of twenty, I decided I'd be safer from men-monsters only if I addressed myself as Mrs Wicks. He was an old man, a rich old man who was no longer interested in earthly things. All that remained of his duties was to go to church

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then return home. I happened to be his only hope. I was his personal secretary and also his daughter. But those who didn't know thought I was his wife. You see, after all that time, you came into my life. I became mad about you which you don't seem to have realized. I wish you'd know how much I have tried to resist the temptation but failed. You must promise me dear that you wouldn't have an affair with any lady as long as I live. Please promise. If you know you will, then tell me

and I will commit suicide here and now.*

"This is the second time you have talked about suicide. You know it is not good, don't you?"

"I wish you could understand me. There is nothing as bad as shame. I'd rather be dead than get ashamed. How do you think I'd feel, for instance, if you left me for my house girl? Well. I don't mean I am a better woman than her but just look at the picture. Me craving to have you and you running away from me to Eva. Tell me, Wamathina, do you love her? You know that would make all the difference. Remember I have asked you that question several times before. If you had given me a frank answer, then all this would not be taking place."

That was a debate which to me was endless. Miss Janet was madly in love with me just as I was with Eva. The good thing was that she understood my position and agreed to give me time to change places, which I was sure I wasn't going to do. I couldn't imagine life without Eva no matter how hard I tried.

I did not call Eva as I had promised. This was in order to avoid further clashes since Janet had her eyes on me throughout. The following two days, I had to pretend I had contracted some malaria to avoid more sex. But it was not an easy thing with a beauty like Janet and what I had already learnt, I could not resist once in a while.

I called Eva on the fourth day but the phone was picked by the gardener. I disconnected the line and decided to call at night

when I was sure he wouldn't be in the main house. I wasn't surprised to hear him on the line because I knew he sometimes answered it.

Days passed well. In the morning we'd both go for jogging after which we'd take breakfast. In our suite, we'd clear the sitting room and perform some exercises. Janet was good in karate and I enjoyed some of her kicks. During the day, we'd go out to see places and then some picnic in the evening. Life between us was now easy. She had changed greatly and didn't bring Eva's topic again. "I have left you to Qod. He

knows I love you and I want you to be with me all my life. I am sure He will get you for me." These were her last words as far as our relationship was concerned. But she was good and was no comparison with whomever I had had before. Even Joy who left me in the wilderness wouldn't match Janet.

On Wednesday 7th, at around 10.00 am the telephone rung. Janet was in the bathroom and I had just finished dressing. I took it from the extension in the bedroom.

"Hello, suite 305."

"Is that Adams?"

"Yes, can I help you?"

"You have a visitor downstairs. Can I send her up?"

"Are you sure she wants Adams?"

Who could she be? Would Eva think of coming? What problem would bring her here? My heartbeats started their usual rhythm as I imagined what Janet would think about it. She'd run mad and I'd feel much concerned. After learning the truth about her, my attitude towards her had changed. Just like Eva, I had taken Janet for a loose lady who had married Wicks because of money. I also thought that she had other men friends besides Wicks, especially those who visited her at home. Now I knew she was a decent lady who had fallen in love with the closest man to her just as any other woman would. After all, you wouldn't

avoid liking a person who really loved you. I didn't want to do anything that would make her shed tears again and it was for the same reason that I avoided calling Eva openly.

Tes, she wants Adams Wamathina staying in Diani Beach Hotel. There is only one Diani Beach and only one Adams Wamathina here."

"Thanks, it is only that I didn't expect a visitor. I'll come down in a minute. Give her something on me."

I went to the bathroom and called Janet to tell her I was going downstairs to see a visitor. Before she could ask questions, I moved away shouting that I'd be back in a minute.

At the counter, I was told my visitor was at the beach side. I went there in a hurry. I wanted to know why Eva would come. I was certain it had to be Eva because I didn't have any other lady in my life except her and Janet who was right now in our room. There was a good number of single women seated on the wooden seats facing the beach. Most of them had drinks in the glasses they were holding. Eva wasn't anywhere to be seen. As I passed my eyes through, I caught sight of a young lady seated alone facing the entrance. 'Qod really created women, I thought as I moved towards her to have a good look at her. She appeared to me as one of those young ladies who came to Kenya to spend money, most likely having been sponsored by their wealthy parents. This one I guessed was an Arab. But that didn't matter. What was the greatest concern to me was her captivating beauty. Pairs of different eyes were all on her, even of her womenfolk.

Eva wasn't there, so it had to be someone else. As I turned to go back to the counter, I met the eyes of the receptionist. She pointed at the attractive lady meaning that, that beauty was my visitor. 'Christ, from where would I get such a blessing?' I wondered as I realized I had now grown to be a womanizer.

"Hello, I am Adams. I understand you want to see me?"

She got to her feet and bowed her head, she then took my

hand and shook it happily. "I am Marie Aslam. I am overjoyed to meet you, sir."

'Why, sir?' I wondered. So much respect could spoil things for me, I thought.

"Aslam? It rings a bell but not quite clear. Let's take a seat somewhere." I moved her from the many eyes and took her to the furthest corner, where we would be in a position to see everyone on the beach without them seeing us.

"Aslam somebody ..." Then it clicked. "Oh yes, Mohammed Aslam Bin Aslam. Is he your father?"

"You have a good memory. Yes he is."

"How is he? Did he regain consciousness? He was the victim of the python."

"He is doing very well. In fact he is moving a little on his own. He regained consciousness the following day. He in fact recalled most of what had happened. He sent me to you."

"Oh yes, I remember we left our contact with the hospital authorities. I am glad to hear he can stand and try to walk. It was a bad experience. I took a few snaps of him halfway swallowed. I hope he will survive to see the pictures."

"I would like to see them myself. The story is incredible."

"I'll have to pick them from the studio today. What does he want?"

"To see you. He has bothered the nurses so much. They have called here three times without getting you. There's something bothering him and his doctor says that this is affecting his quick recovery. The night nurses say he screams in his dreams."

"I can see him this afternoon. I hope you'll accompany me. Where do you stay?"

"Milimani."

I might just as well have not asked. I didn't know where Milimani was and that didn't help me. But I wasn't going to tell her that. All I wanted to know was how we would meet so that we would go to the hospital

together.

"What is the best time to see him?" I asked,

"Between 2.30 pm and 4.00 pm. Anytime we get him awake we will be allowed to see him. The doctor has given instructions that when you go and you find him awake, you should be allowed to see him."

"That's okay then. We can leave at 2.30 pm. Is it okay with you?"

"Anytime is okay with me. All my time now is allocated to him until he leaves the hospital."

"Are you his only daughter?"

"His only child. My two brothers and my mother died in a tragic accident twenty years ago. I was only one year then. My father took care of me until I grew up. He didn't marry another wife, afraid that I would be mistreated by the second wife. He looked after me until I grew up. I owe him my life."

"That's very sad but I am sure you have now got used to the circumstances."

"Yah, what makes it easier is the fact that I did not know my mother and my brothers. It is just a story to me. What is of great importance to me is my father. He is everything to me."

"I can understand that. Why do you think he wants to see me? Any clue?"

"No, and that makes me very curious. Okay, he might be willing to thank you personally for saving his life because you certainly did. But that can't be it. He would have waited till he leaves hospital if that were the case. This is something he doesn't want to tell anybody else - not even me, which makes it all the more strange. I have never known anything he wasn't ready to share with me. We are so close that he tells me of his private things - even the women he goes out with. I just don't

know what it is. Even his doctor is confused. He says it's only you who can have him rest."

"Who says that? Your father or the doctor?"

"The doctor of course," she laughed a little. "He even told me to persuade you using all means available. Imagine a thing like that."

"Then I should have let you persuade me. I'd have had a great chance of recommending myself to you." I said jokingly and laughed. She too laughed at the joke.

"I had a feeling you wouldn't be difficult. You are a likable person and you don't need to take much trouble. You men don't seem to realize that even women fall in love just by looking at a man just as you do. It is only that we are shy and at times able to resist."

'What a frank lady!' I thought.

We have about three hours to go. Mow are you engaged between now and then? Can I make a suggestion?" She sipped some drink out of the glass in her hand and looked at me. I could see she was trying to make some kind of a decision. She made up her mind. "Mind if I make the suggestion myself?"

"That would take two minds to decide."

"You mean your wife? I am sorry."

"Don't be sorry, lam. . ."I was about to tell herthe truth that I wasn't married, but I decided that would be unfair to Janet. "Give me some ten minutes to prepare myself while you take a good look at the couples running after each other. I'll be with you in ten minutes."

"Thank you. I think you are a gentleman. I like you."

"You don't need to use your doctor's advice. I have already agreed." We both laughed as I turned to go.

"You took too long. Who was your visitor?" Janet asked me as I took a packet of cigarettes from the bedside locker.

"Miss Aslam - Marie Aslam. Does it click?"

"No. How did she know where to find you and who is she if you don't mind me asking?"

"Those two questions should give you the answer. There is

only one place where we gave our contact and in fact it was you who gave it because I didn't know where we were going." She thought for a few seconds.

"Okay, that has to be the hospital. Yes, your tycoon, he was someone Aslam."

"Qood, Mohammed Aslam Bin Aslam. Mis daughter Marie is hereto take me to him. He is recovering and already conscious."

"What does he want to see you for?"

"Mobody knows. It sounds very interesting. May be he has a story to tell me. Well, I can't guess. Why don't you accompany us?"

"I am very sorry dear but please do excuse me. Don't feel offended because I'll be a bit busy. Please ..."

"Okay, I understand. I will be quite okay." She made things easier for me only she didn't know.

"Thank you dear. I hope you don't mind," Janet said. I could see her 'mother's concern' which she had almost every time she wanted me to behave well. This portrayed her deep love for me. I was gripped by some inexplicable fear. That kind of love was in most cases very dangerous.

I took the keys of the Benz and put them in my hip pocket. I took the packet of cigarettes and after wishing Janet a nice day with a kiss on

the lips, I went out.

I met Marie in the lobby talking to a waiter and we went to the parking lot together. We didn't have to use Janet's Benz. She had her own car. I couldn't believe it was her car. She was too young for it. She too was driving a Benz, a sports Saloon 250SE. In the parking lot, there were only two other Benz cars. Janet's and another one which had just arrived with an Indian.

"You have a beautiful car here. It suits you and looks exactly like you."

"Thank you. That is if you are serious."

"You know Marie, you have a combination of two things, good things which are very rare to find - beauty and humour. Anyone can be forced to like you."

"Thank you. I can now detect you are serious." She reversed out of the parking and engaged gear number one. On the opposite side we came to Janet's car.

"I drive that one," I said, which of course was true. *

She took a good look at it and said, "A good taste too. Qood combination as well."

"Which ones I wonder?"

"A good man, a good car and a good something else."

"What else? I am now in for a surprise in my life." She laughed.

"Qood at avoiding telling some stranger about yourself but likely to drain the stranger all about herself. Say I am not right so that we can argue. I am good at it."

"A good advantage over me. 1 am in Mombasa for a holiday."

"Is that all I can be entrusted with? I am not a gossip." "

"Well, I am a driver and a private investigator. The Managing Director of Wicks and Wyne Detective Agency. I hope now I am not being mean."

"That's good. You sure look like a detective, a real spy. That makes me start doubting your holiday. Is it a real one?"

"Very real, very real, my dear." We were silent for a minute as the sports Benz rolled on the road at a high speed. She was a good driver.

At midday, we arrived at Milimani. The bungalow into which we parked was something you didn't take into your picture from just looking at it. If anything, it was not constructed on a quarter of an acre. The compound was many acres of land, covered with flower gardens, which were divided by paths across and downwards.

I was past getting surprises after getting used to Janet's heaven' and what I saw here was what I had got used to. The

only difference was that the sitting room here was bigger. We sat for ten minutes and she asked me to follow her out. At the back of the bungalow there was a large chicken's house and two large kennels. I helped her feed the chicken and the dogs.

"That is why I needed the two hours, " she told me as we worked. "The house girl and the gardener ran off together. The lady helped herself with a few of my clothes and pairs of shoes. She also stole a few suits from my father's wardrobe."

"Tough luck. Are you thinking of new workers?"

"Two are coming in this evening. Lets' get in and prepare some lunch then we can go and see A/zee."

We arrived at Aga Khan Hospital shortly before two o'clock. Marie introduced me to the sister in charge.

"This is Adams Wamathina. We have got him at last."

I noticed something that I didn't like and my instincts alerted me. As soon as my name was mentioned, the sister in charge looked at the nurse she was talking to. They seemed confused about something and seemed not to believe I was Adams. Marie too noticed this and asked, "Is there anything wrong sister? Is my father alright?"

"Yes he is alright, but just a few minutes ago I introduced him to a man calling himself Adams Wamathina. I have just come from there."

"Hurry up." I said before anyone else could talk. "Take me up there immediately. That's impersonation."

Before the sister could make up her mind, Marie held my hand and ran towards the ward. On first floor we turned right, then left to room number 4. I burst into the room first.

The phoney Adams, who was certainly searching the room jumped to his feet. He didn't look frightened. Instead he looked dangerous and ready to get himself out of the situation under any circumstances. A good look at him told me I was facing a very dangerous person who could fight. He didn't wait since he

knew he was trapped but came for me. Although he was noticeably bigger than me, he didn't frighten me any little bit. I knew I would put up a good fight when need be, like then.

The disadvantage our 'Adams' had was lack of knowledge as to the type of man I was. He hadn't expected a man who would put up a good fight but instead expected a common man. I blocked his right blow and gave him a slight jab to see his reaction. He tried another one, this time a bit harder and faster. For a man used to the ring which is slightly smaller than the space we had in this room, his blow was a waste of effort. I got hold of his right arm and passed him over my shoulder after giving him a pull.

He landed next to the door with a bang. I didn't go for him. I waited

for him to stand. He stood but with a gun in hand.

"Get out of the way!" The harsh voice told Marie. She gave way. He opened the door, his gun still pointed at me. He banged the door behind him. I gave him two seconds then opened the door.

"Please don't follow him, he'll shoot you, please . . .!" Marie cried, but her cries fell on deaf ears.

I ran faster than ever. I saw him run towards the parking lot. By the time he opened the door of his Mazda 323i was outside, my gun in hand. I shot twice aiming at the right rear wheel but only managed to wake up every patient in the hospital and have all the staff looking out of the windows to see what was going on. I looked helplessly as the Mazda sped out of the hospital's gate. I put the gun back where it had stayed since it was handed over to me. With a permit to carry a gun and use it when necessary, there was nothing to fear. The authority came from big people and they had agreed I was qualified to carry a gun. Who was I to refuse?

I turned and found Marie just a few steps behind me. She had her hand on the mouth as if to suppress a cough that was never coming.

"This is one thing I'll never understand in my life. Why would someone take the trouble of impersonating me to see your father?" I asked.

"That is very strange. Did you notice my father's condition?"

"I didn't have the time. How is he?"

"Unconscious again. I think he fainted. What do you think the man was looking for?"

"I wouldn't even guess. What beats me most is where the man got my name from."

"And how did he know my father wanted to see you? How did he know

that the nurses he was going to meet and introduce himself to as Adams didn't know you?"

"He is a well informed guy. That's all I can say about him, or still, that there's something your father has which he wants."

We went back to the reception where the hospital staff had gathered - speculating. They kept quiet when we reached them. It was like they were expecting us to address them.

An Indian, about 45 years old, whom I later learnt was the hospital superintendent came forward and talked to us. He had heard the story from the sister whom we had met earlier but he wanted our version. When I had given him the whole story, he looked relieved and worried at the same time.

"Are you a cop?" he asked me.

"Mo," I answered, "just a private guy licensed to carry a gun and use it when necessary." A section of the staff laughed then dispersed. I think they went to pass word to the patients that everything was under control so they shouldn't worry. Together with the hospital superintendent and the sister, we went back to Aslam's room. To our surprise, he was seated facing the door as if he was expecting us. When Marie entered at last, I noticed Aslam sigh with relief. She went straight to him.

"How are you feeling, dad?"

"I am okay. Did you get the man?"

"He got lost. We chased him up to where he had parked his car but he managed to escape."

"What are you talking about, dear? Who escaped?"

"Marie," I called. She looked at me. "He is not aware of what you are talking about. I think he means the real Adams." She understood and

immediately amended her mistake.

"Oh, I am sorry, dad. I got him, or don't you mean Adam Wamathina? Here he is." She pulled my arm and joined it to her father's who on hearing my name struggled to stand. I stopped him.

"Adams, I am so grateful that you are at last here. Please give me a chance to talk to my daughter and son." This he told to the superintendent who got hold of the sister and closed the door. Up to now, Mohammed Aslam was holding my hand. Twice he kissed it and muttered things only known to himself. Then he asked us to sit down on the two chairs in his room. We pulled the chairs closer to the bed as he requested and remained silent to listen. He started addressing us.

"You saved my life young man. If it wasn't for you I wouldn't be seated here. I would be no more. Whatever happened that day is very clear in my mind. I could see myself being swallowed but there was nothing I could do about it. I was so weak. Both my legs were dislocated, one broken too and I was injured in the ribs. When I saw the python approaching me, I got such a shock till I fainted. When I regained consciousness, I was swallowed up to the waist. I tried to fight but all in vain. Sensing defeat, I think I blacked out for good until I found myself in the hospital. My son, I owe my life to you. Are you married? I'd give my daughter to you without a second thought."

Marie and I laughed as we exchanged glances. We were sure the old man meant what he said. But I decided not to answer but let him continue.

"Do not laugh I What I have called you here for is not a

laughing matter. I want you two to be one, so that when I send you away from here I can rest assured that my son and daughter are looking after my interests. But I can already see you are friends.

"Now, to come to the sad part of the story, I want to disclose something to you. Whatever begot me that night was not an accident, it was an attempted murder. There is a group of people who can do

anything in order to get a small document I am in possession of. They can commit mass murders to get it. That is what is killing me. The document in question is worth eighty five million shillings. As long as I have the document in my possession I am not safe. This group can come even into this ward I am in. Every time that door is opened, I expect trouble. I can see my daughter is already frightened. This is why I wanted to hand this matter over to her in the presence of a man I can trust. When I learned of the person who brought me here I decided he is the right man. You are the only man I can entrust the document and my daughter to. When I hand over the document to you, I know I'll have handed you death on the other hand. That, I very well know.

"But I am depending on the fact that no one will know. I would hate to think that the group would go after my daughter. That too would cause me a lot of heartache. When I have given you this document, it is for you to know where it is required so that the money, in form of the largest diamond in the world, can be released to you. I can at least trust you to get a good person, a person who is ready to be shot at and who will agree to take the risks involved for a fee of thirty per cent of the diamond's current value. That would be approximately thirty million shillings." Here again we exchanged glances. The story seemed incredible but for the person telling it. 'What would I do with thirty million shillings?' I thought. I had now known I would do the job. With that kind of money, I would take any risk.

"I can see my son is deep in thought. What do you do for a living?"

Marie didn't let me answer. She seemed excited as she introduced me.

"Dad, this man you see here is a spy."

"Mot a spy, dear/ I corrected her.

"He is an investigator, a detective, private detective, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said.

"Dad, you must have been unconscious some few minutes ago. Did you hear a loud bang before we came in. Something like a tyre burst?"

"That's what woke me up. I thought I was dreaming. What was it?"

"When we came in here, there was a man searching ..." She gave him the whole story which he listened to without interrupting.

At last he sighed, "Yes, there was that man here. I thought I was dreaming, even when I told you right now that those people can come for the document right here. I had a feeling it had already happened but still took it to be a dream. My mind is not quite clear as it was a few days ago. My doctor recommended some sleeping pills for me and I think they have some bad effect on me. But right now let me go back to our story. You just surprised me with the story of our friend here. I am sure now, Qod is with me and I have no doubt that the document plus you, will be in the right hands.

"No one else knows where that document is and nobody will know that I have handed it over to you. That will be to our advantage. While they take time monitoring me and my possible movements, you will be on your way to secure the treasure. We have a code name for it - MABA meaning Mohammed Aslam Bin Aslam. My great grandfather's full names. There is no time now to tell you the history about the diamond and how I got involved in all these. That is a very long story because it is over one

hundred years old. But one day, when this is all over, we will sit down together and you will hear the whole story."

He produced a key from under the blankets he had covered his legs with. It was a tiny key which glittered when it reflected light through the open window. He handed it over to me. He then asked for a piece of paper and a pen. He wrote this message:

Sir,

Thank you for your services. Please hand over the briefcase to the bearer of this note who will identify himself (beyond any reasonable doubt) as one Adams Wamathina. Please refer to your Codes Register and check code number CV-MA002.

Yours sincerely, M. Aslam

He handed this letter to me. He let me read it before he resumed his talk.

"Do you know Norfolk Hotel?" I nodded. "Hand over that note to the duty manager and he will act as instructed in it. Inside the briefcase he will hand over to you, you will find several things. One, an introduction letter, two, a map and three, an envelope in which you'll find a card cut diagonally. The other half of the card is with the person who will hand over the diamond to you. Remember its code name - MABA. Without that half card, I too cannot get the MABA. You will notice that the half card has a story which one cannot understand unless the other half is available. The full card has instructions to be followed to help the person on the other side get to the MABA. Without my half of the card he too is helpless. Remember, whoever has this half of the card is the rightful owner of MABA no matter who takes it there. If those people chasing me get possession of it, they are the rightful owners. You understand? That is why it is so dangerous - they know the secret.

"The map simply shows you the location of the home. It is a

long journey- long, dangerous journey to ncnness. The town to which you are going is bordering Zaire and Tanzania. Lastly, the introduction letter will help you get in touch with Lord Hayee whom you wouldn't get a chance to meet without this letter. Is there anything you do not understand?"

Tes, though off the whole operation. Is there anything illegal about the whole set up so that I can know where I stand and the precautions to take?" He smiled, looked at his daughter, then landed his eyes on me.

"I think you are an intelligent young man. I like you. As I told you, this is a story which dates back to over a hundred years. It involves several governments - three African states and their colonizers. Each would like to get in touch with MABA but they cannot do it officially. They would like this done secretly for reasons known to the highest officials

only. If they knew you were going for it, they would try to stop you by all means. They should not know. As I told you, this is one of the most risky things you'll ever come across. You cannot earn thirty million shillings without taking a terrible risk."

"When do we take off?" I asked humourously.

Marie, whom I had addressed myself to, laughed, then went dead silent. The story was too much for her. The old man looked at the two of us, then asked Marie, "Did you bring the cheque book with you?" She nodded for an answer and from her handbag she produced the cheque book. The old man took it, flipped through the pages and wrote on one leaf. He signed, tore it off and handed it over to me. I read: Please pay the sum of three hundred thousand shillings only-Kshs 300,000. I looked at the figure below and thought I was getting it all wrong. Does he mean thirty thousand shillings or three hundred thousand? And who is supposed to be the owner of the cheque? He interrupted my thoughts by answering the very question I had in mind.

"You will notice that I have not indicated who should be paid that money. The first reason is that I do not know what names you officially use. Secondly, you might opt to have somebody else take the money for you in which case you'd only have to fill in the names or the name of your company for that matter."

I remembered I had just drained my account after buying the five thousand five hundred shillings' engagement ring. I smiled at the thought.

"Yes, son, it is fun to have money - the greatest asset of all the time. You can smile confidently. Wait till you safely land that treasure in my hands and you'll have a permanent smile on your mouth." We all laughed, with me reflecting the fact that the rich wanted to get richer. Here was a man who was in a position to give an open cheque of three hundred thousand shillings without even flinching, yet he wanted to get more. Can the human race really have enough money? I wondered.

We left the hospital at around 3.30 pm. On our way back to Diani Beach, my mind was wholly occupied. I thought of the risky mission. It was certainly a hard job, a kind of a job I had never attempted in my life yet I felt determined to take it. The money involved would certainly make anybody's star shine. That kind of money would attract even the few multi-millionaires we had in the country. What really made me believe there was real money involved was the cheque in my pocket. According to Mohammed, that was supposed to cover travel expenses. I had been to Tanzania twice. The first time I went as far as Arusha and back. The second time I got to Moshi then to the capital city, Dares Salaam. During both journeys, I had not spent over ten thousand shillings. Why three hundred thousand? Or was I supposed to charter a plane? I didn't know what answers to give to myself. I simply concluded that Mr. Mohammed Aslam bin Aslam knew what he was doing and was definitely better informed. 'Qo and cash the cheque Son of Fate. If you succeed

in bringing MABA home, you'll be a millionaire overnight. By then your star will have shone so brightly that it will be burning people's eyes.'

"You are so quiet, Adams. Let me know what you are thinking about. Aren't we in it together?*

Tour father gave you to me. Do you remember?*

"You didn't accept the offer. You didn't even answer his question.*

"What question? Me didn't ask me any questions.* Well, does he still want to know? In any case it doesn't matter. What matters is the fact that he handed you over to me on a platter, a thing he clearly stated he wouldn't do to anybody else. So, it is simple - Miss Marie Aslam belongs to me. If she refuses or disregards her father's wish and declaration then she has the right to do so. But . . .*

"But what?" she interrupted. "That old man who is my dad should know better than to hand me over to a person whose life is balancing on life and death. You'll either take the job or me. But not the two of

us. If you take the job, forget about me and if you take me, forget about the job. As simple as that." I looked at her, wondering whether she was serious or not. But that simple glance was enough to tell me that I was dealing with a most vociferous person.

"Then there goes the thirty EM." I said and produced the cheque Mohammed had given me.

"Tell dad what we decided. Tell him we cannot afford to lose each other." Instead of taking the cheque which I had extended to her, she started laughing. I had got her off balance and she knew it. Nothing would have stopped me from taking the job, anyway. Who would stand between me and thirty million shillings? Eva? Yes, Eva could have persuaded me to stop but she wouldn't do it. She wouldn't try to stand between me and what I dearly loved to do. She was just so sweet to me.

"Okay you win. What are your plans? What happens after I have taken you back to the beach hotel?*

"I'll consult Janet. She's my boss. I'll request her to terminate the holiday, now that I have other things to do."

"Is she in the same hotel with you?"

"Yes. After I have talked to her then I can be in a position to tell you my next move. But there's one thing we must try not to forget."

"What is that?" she interrupted as if she knew what I was driving at. "Go ahead and tell me."

"Whatever I am intending to do, you'll be right at the centre of the plans. Two, you belong to me."

Marie dropped me at the hotel and headed back home. We agreed that I would call her and enlighten her on the progress.

I went straight to our suite where I found Janet who also had just arrived. We exchanged a few intimate words then she sat to listen to

my story. When I had finished, I was surprised by what I saw on her face. She looked like she was going to faint. She had turned dark, the face very pale and seemingly very tired. I rushed and held her. I wasn't sure of what had happened to her. One would have thought she had most likely swallowed poison.

"Adams," she called with a voice that was almost inaudible, "please don't take that risk, nobody can go through that alive. That is certainly one bait which will kill so many. I do not want you to die. Please Adams, we have enough money to enjoy ourselves all through our lives. Please forget about it as I can't imagine losing you ..."

She talked for a good fifteen minutes. She didn't give me a chance even to answer the questions she asked in between. So I let her exhaust herself. When she was silent and looked at me for an answer, I told her, "You'd have asked me what my plans were before you drew your own conclusions. Janet, do you really think I too would like to lose you? Have you forgotten what

I told you last time, that I owe you a lot that if it wasn't for you I still wouldn't have found my way out? Why do you think I gave you this story? Would I have done it had I not considered the fact that whatever concerns me concerns you also. Please do relax your mind. I know what to do about this. We came here for a holiday in order to forget other businesses, to relax and be happy.* I kissed her on the cheeks and was happy to see I had convinced her. The smile she had on her face this time was from a self satisfied beautiful millionaire lady. If she thought I would put off the job, she didn't know me well then.

'People are funny/1 thought. How the hell does one think of suggesting to me that I run away from a cheque of three hundred thousand shillings and a possible thirty million shillings.

The phone rang to call Janet to meet her visitor at the reception. As she went out I took the phone to call Eva. I felt I really missed her. If there was anyone else entitled to make a decision on this matter apart from me, it was Eva. But before I called, I had decided that I wouldn't

tell her of all the risks involved. I knew that would worry her, making her opt to having me all in one piece at her disposal other than riches and being far away where she wouldn't be sure of my fate.

"Hello, who's that? Bakari? Well tell Eva I want to talk to her.'

"Lo! Wee huna habari? Huyo alienda zake, asha timua. Wee mgeni na wanawake nini? Kahepa yeye na mali ya wenyewe. Walai amesafisha nyumba yote. Sasa asakenywa na polisi lakini wampate wapi huyo kahaba . . ."and the story went on and on.

I don't know for how long I had lain on the floor of the sitting room unconscious. What I knew was that I heard a loud scream which penetrated inside my brains like electrical waves do when you touch naked wires. I thought it was a dream. I opened my eyes and perceived a structure of a lady approaching me. The picture was not very clear but when she touched me, I became wholly awake.

"What is it, darling. What happened?" Janet asked me as she helped me from the floor.

"Where am I?" I asked her.

"You are home. What happened? Were you attacked?"

I looked around myself and I didn't know what to say simply because I couldn't remember what had happened.

"Were you using the phone?" Janet asked me after noticing the receiver hanging on one side of the phone table. The picture started coming back, just as it had happened.

"I think I used the phone. I am not sure whether I called or was called." But by now the picture was a bit clear. What I did not want to disclose was what made me get unconscious as that is what I saw before the phone fell off my hands.

"Better go and have a rest, Adams. I think this is fatigue. I'll give you

some tablets to help you get some sleep."

I left the sitting room and lay on the bed facing the ceiling. I realized I was caressing the talisman my grandmother had given me and that my man, my long time accomplice was trying to tell me something. Who was this who always came when I had a problem that bothered me mentally? I wondered.

'Son of Fate, did you hear right? Eva has bolted - gone. Yes, that's what Bakari told you. That she bolted and stole all that belonged to Janet. That the police were looking for her but can't get that prostitute of a . . . Yes, Bakari called your beloved Eva a prostitute. He didn't even give you time to ask questions, he talked on and on, calling your Eva all the dirty names in the Swahili dictionary. Look man, you have just started the struggles you will ..." I refused to listen. I let go the talisman and reached for a cigarette and lit it. As I smoked, the picture became clearer and clearer. The telephone rang.

I wriggled myself off the bed and reached for the extension. I had forgotten Janet would pick it from the sitting room. I was about to put mine back on its cradle when I heard a voice I thought was Bakari's. I was right.

"Is that you Bakari? How are you?"

"It's me, madam. I am fine. All is fine here. He had called."

"Just a moment please. Hold on the line. I'll be back."

That was Janet telling Bakari. Her voice was not the usual one. It was filled with some kind of fear.

Some instinct told me she was coming to check whether I was listening and I immediately put the phone down. I had sensed danger especially when Bakari said, 'He had called.' That would only have to be me. What was going on between the two? By the time she entered the bedroom, I was pretentiously dead asleep. She came to the bed and touched me on the face. When I didn't even stir, she gave me a slight

kiss on the mouth, turned and left. I opened my eyes to see her swinging her buttocks out of the room. I reached for the phone as she lightly closed the door behind her.

"Hello," Bakari said.

I kept quiet. Then I heard Janet call, "Hello, it is okay now. You told me he had called?"

"Yes, about one hour ago. I tried to call you thirty minutes later but the phone was still engaged. When I told him that Eva had gone, the line just went dead. He didn't talk again."

"What exactly did he say when he called?"

"He told me to tell Eva that he wanted to talk to her. That was all."

"What did you tell him?"

"That the girl ran off with your clothes and that the police were looking for her."

"Are you sure you didn't tell him that she is already in prison." I started trembling but braved myself to learn all.

"No, madam. I didn't tell him that she is already in prison. I didn't mention her arrest."

"Thank you. I was informed by the station's police boss that her case will be heard tomorrow at 9.30 am. You should be there

as a witness in case they need you. But I understand she has agreed to plead guilty. I'll give you a good cheque when this is all over, do you understand? Just do as you're requested.*

I jumped out of the bed and went straight to the sitting room where I found Janet looking for something from the chest of drawers where she had put several of the files she had come to Mombasa with. I didn't want to talk to her. What I had heard on phone made me not even

want to have a look at her. Everything was now quite clear. She had realized I was madly in love with Eva and had planned to get rid of her. Oh, how I wished I had listened to Eva.

I went straight to the phone and dialed the number Marie had given me. It was exactly one and a half hours since we had parted. Would she be home?

"Hello, Mohammed's residence?" I recognized her voice.

"Hello Marie. I am glad I got you. How long can it take you to drive here, at a speed of 200 kmph?"

"What is wrong, has something come up?"

"How long?" I repeated.

"Fifteen minutes at that speed or never at all. Do you want me to take the gamble?"

"Mo please, make it thirty minutes. I want you alive,"

"Thanks, I'll be there. I hope I'll meet you all in one piece. Bye."

"You will, thanks - bye." I put the receiver down.

I was aware Janet had stopped what she was doing and was staring at me - astounded. Who cared! My mind, my whole mind was on Eva in remand awaiting trial tomorrow morning on trumped up charges to which she was going to plead guilty after what I no doubt knew was after torture and intimidation by a hired police station commander. I had dealt with police in this country and I knew how they worked on people, especially those who were unlucky to fall victims of the rich. The rich were

generous to the poorly paid police officers in a country where the cost of living had hit the skies. But this time they were wrong - not Eva. I was going to do anything to save her. I mean, anything. If the money I had received from Mohammed wasn't enough, then I had the gun.

When I said 'anything to save hei" I meant every word of it. That now I realized, was one mistake Janet and her friends had made -1 mean, licensing me to carry a gun and approving me as a private detective having buried my criminal records where they would never find them again - ever.

"Darling, what is the matter. Where are you going in such a hurry?" Janet asked me when I went back to the bedroom and started changing. I looked at her, wondering what was the best thing to do to her. I would have slapped her but I managed to resist the temptation. I looked at her and saw that 'motherly concern' I had admired and which had made me vow to like her and to repay her in any possible way. But this time the concern failed to register, remembering the inhuman treatment she had applied to my wife, I mean, Eva.

"Please tell me. Don't be angry with me for no reason." She was almost weeping. I was slightly touched. What a lover! I looked away, then looked at her again, straight in the eyes.

"I am going to correct your mistakes so that I can keep on loving you." She didn't seem to understand, simply because she didn't know I had heard her conversation with her gardener.

'Bakari -1 pity. You have never met me - the Son of Tate in a revengeful mood. When you go to court, if you ever will, then it will be to sing the truth. You'll tell the court of the plot, everything. I swear you will.' When I glanced at myself in the mirror, I thought I was looking at somebody else who resembled me somehow. I had never seen my face so pale, so beaten even when I had problems - lots of problems hanging on my shoulders. Yes, not even when I was a shoe shiner and later a night watchman.

I took my packet of cigarettes and put it in my jacket's pocket with the gun at my hip and a warrant to carry it in my wallet. I had a card identifying me as an approved private detective. I was now ready to meet whatever was ahead of me. There was no difference between me and a cop with those documents on me. They had the approval of the Commissioner of Police and his signature was very clear.

"Please, Adams, at least tell me where you are going. Do not leave me worried." Janet said again. I wished she knew how I hated answering her. It was with much effort that I kept off insults.

"Janet, I once admired you for your intelligence. Just relax and try to think what I told you a few minutes ago and I am sure you'll come up with an answer."

"But tell me, are you angry about something?"

"Yes!" I said curtly.

"Has it got anything to do with me. Am I the cause?"

"I do not know. I'll see you soon." I closed the door behind me knowing too well that she'd soon emerge behind me.

Marie's black Benz entered the gate to the hotel just as I stepped out into the lobby. I felt some kind of a relief and was filled with happiness which I would not explain. She stopped right at my feet.

"What's going on? I hope they haven't started?"

"I don't know whether or not they have. But please right now let me drive you. We have a long journey ahead. Are you ready to go with me? Right now the most important thing to me is the car, I want the car."

From the way I was talking, I think she detected plenty of urgency in my voice. She didn't answer but unfastened the safety belt after which she stepped out. She hurried to the co-drivers seat and as she fastened the safety belt, I was on the last bump out of the hotel.

"I want us to be in Nairobi by six. Do you think we can make it?"

"That would mean driving about Vive, hundred kilometres in about two and a half hours. An average of two hundred kilometres per hour. You cannot make it and you have to accept it."

"All the same, I'll try. If we don't we have nothing to lose, while on the

contrary we have everything to gain."

"Would I now know what prompted this urgent trip?"

"You are entitled to know everything. Before anything else we are going to engage a lawyer to represent some innocent person who'll be taken to court tomorrow at 9.30 am. After that I will pick up a gardener called Bakari from a home in Milimani and take him to a lonely place where I'll tape a statement from him and then take him to a police station where he will write another statement. From there we will go and rest. The following day we will go to Norfolk Hotel and get the suitcase after which we will go to my bank where I'll withdraw some cash out of what dad gave us. Then after we have agreed, we can probably go for the treasure. Are we together in all this, I wonder?"

"One thing at a time my dear spy. I do not want to contradict myself. But in all what you have told me there's only one point I would like to have some clarification on."

"Which part?"

"From the police station we go to rest. Where and how?"

I laughed. I expected a more serious question. I continued laughing until the petrol attendant where we stopped to refill was forced to join me. No one had ever amused me to that extent in my life.

Chapter Six

By the time the city lights went on, we were waiting for the traffic lights on Haile Sellasie Avenue to give permission to plunge into Moi Avenue.

I met the lawyer I wanted, reversing his vehicle out of the parking. He often left the office as late as 7.30 pm.

"Hello Adams, it's long since we met. You seem to be doing very well."

The last time he had seen me, I wasn't driving a Merc 250 sports with

Miss Coast Province beside me. He met me last when I went to see him to seek his advice on the land I had inherited after the title deed got burnt up in Mathare Valley. At that time I wasn't well placed and he didn't expect me to be anything better than what I was then - a shoe shiner. What confused him even more was the fact that being a relative, he happened to know our family inside out. no one who knew the family so well would expect a man to shoot up from the family and become someone to be respected, to have anything better than a bicycle, leave alone getting near a Merc, as owning one was out of question - a day dream. But now, here was one and he no doubt seemed to own it.

"Yah, I am doing well Mr. Muita," I shook his hand. "They say life is full of ups and downs. Could we please see you in your office if that wouldn't inconvenience you."

"You are most welcome." He led us to his office on the 8th floor of Community House. When we were seated, I introduced the two. He seemed to be in a hurry so I decided to get straight to my point.

"Tomorrow morning at around 9.30 am, a young girl by the

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name Eva Wanaruona will be taken to court to answer a trumped up charge of theft. I want you to stand for her defence. From the information I have, she might plead guilty immediately the charges are read. It is quite obvious that the police have tortured her into accepting the charge. " I gave him the whole story as I knew it though I did not need to involve my name as the trophy being contested for. I also gave him a hint of what I intended to do to Bakari so that by morning he would give a different evidence from what he intended to. This didn't impress the lawyer.

Me warned, "You might be my next client if you do that. You do not have authority whatsoever to interrogate him in anyway. What you'd likely do . . ." As he talked, I reached for my wallet and produced my documents. When I put them on the table he knew what they were

even before he touched them.

"Okay, I see," he said as he reached to take them. "In that case you can talk with him. Well, well, this is very interesting. I did not know you had gone this far. Congratulations. You must have really worked hard."

He wasn't a very bad guy after all. It is only that when one is so poor people have the tendency of looking the other way whenever you pass by them. He was pleased that I had at least become someone, a person he as a lawyer would seek assistance from. When we agreed on the fee I took out my cheque book and gave him a cheque for ten thousand shillings. I knew the following day I'd have my account full of hundreds of thousands of shillings. Ten thousand was peanuts to me. Funny, how this world is, me being in a position to call a five figure amount peanuts.

From Muita's office we drove to Milimani. I did not offer much explanation to Marie. I had lost interest in this place I referred to as 'heaven' because of what Janet had done. I now felt I would never come back to this place after rescuing Eva. Where Eva was

going to after being set free was where I would go. Janet had given us an indirect consent to marry. She had sent us out of her palace and now we would look for our palace, a place where Eva would be the queen. All these things came into my mind as I drove silently to the place where my luck had started.

When I pressed the bell to the bungalow, Bakari opened the front door, and then stood aside to let us enter which we did. I was quick to notice that he didn't talk much as usual and that on seeing me he had taken off his cap, a gesture of respect. When we were all seated, I asked him about Eva and he started narrating the tale he had learnt by heart. I gave Bakari a few slaps on the face before I put him on the back seat of Marie's Benz. I worked on him with my temper almost bursting my head open. I almost killed the Swahili man. When he agreed to tell the real truth, I gave him a break. He agreed that I take him to a different police station from Kilimani where he would record

a statement telling the whole truth, thus implicating our boss and setting my dear Eva free.

At Parklands Police Station, the duty officer was surprised by Bakari's story. It was incredible. Who would believe it anyway? It became credible for the simple reason that it was Bakari telling it.

"I was called by madam (Mrs Wicks/Janet) from Mombasa and she asked me whether I would like to earn some big money to which I agreed without hesitation. She also asked whether I minded the way I earned the money to which I again answered 'No' without hesitation. That was when she told me that she was intending to get rid of Eva Wanaruona because she thought she was now big enough to share things with her ..."

"Just a minute, Bakari. What do you mean by that 'she was big enough to share things with her?' Try to put it exactly as it was." Bakari looked at me as if afraid that what he was to say would implicate me. I didn't interrupt but let him make up his

mind. He decided to put it plainly in Kiswahili which he was more fluent in.

"Aliniambia yakuwa Eva amefikiria yakwamba wametoshana mpaka ikawa watakuwa wakitumia vitu vyake vyote pamoja."

"So what Mrs Wicks was claiming is that the house girl had elevated herself to her employer's level? What do you think of the girl yourself. Is she good?*

"That young girl is perfect if I have to speak the truth. There is something going on there which up to now I do not understand. Mrs. Wicks would simply have sacked the girl but instead she wants her imprisoned. She wants her out of the way where no one can reach her or reunite with her. I am a mature person and I am not blind. I can swear that there is a man Mrs Wicks wants but the man wants the young girl. There is no doubt about that. This is why the young girl is being tortured. She didn't steal anything. She was picked from home

by three police officers. One of the officers gave orders. Me also asked me to get several dresses belonging to Mrs Wicks and pack them in the young girl's suitcase plus another executive suitcase belonging to Mrs Wicks. I was also told to wait for a call from Mrs Wicks who would explain to me the whole story. When she called me minutes later, she promised me good money if I complied. In fact I complied until this evening when Adams explained what would happen to me if I gave false evidence. Hata mimi mwenyewe nilikuwa ninajua nimekosea lakini ni tamaayapesa ilinikosesha. Lakini sitaki sasa, sitaki kifungo mimi. Heri nife maskini. Jela bwana siwezani nayo mie." And so the story went. Who wasn't surprised anyway. But as I said, I knew how the police worked when a millionaire requested them to do something. Money! Money!

Bakari wasn't released. He was locked up in a cell even after his statement was recorded and he had signed. The duty officer, who claimed to be a 'born again christian' had taken the matter

very seriously. He wanted to make a very big case out of this. Someone somewhere was going to be a lesson to other corrupt officers and someone else was to know that money cannot work all the times. I wanted him to do exactly that but most of all, to have Eva freed with immediate effect.

At Safari Park Hotel where we were to spend the night I called Mr Muita as agreed and informed him of the progress. He was to get in touch with the 'born again christian', Superintendent Alex Ochieng Mak Obudo. From the police station, they'd drive together to see the Commissioner of Police, then to court. But that was not my concern. My only concern was one and you already know it.

Friday was a very busy day for me. This was the day my dear one was to be taken to court. Fortunately, Miss Aslam gave me a break. She wanted to get back to Mombasa having remembered what she termed as things of 'vital importance' she had forgotten to attend to due to my hurried arrangements of departure. She would join me immediately she was through - maybe later that day or the following day. She was to go by air.

I started my busy day by driving my mistress to the airport. As I drove back to town, I was now aware that I would set the ball rolling without interruption. I don't mean Miss Aslam was interrupting in any way, but I felt I was forcing her to do some kind of work that she didn't belong to.

I left Queensway Barclays Bank a few minutes to ten o'clock, my pockets bulging with seventy thousand shillings. I was going to do plenty of shopping. What for? The Garden of Eden of course. I was to marry Eva today.

I'll never forget her face when she saw me in court. Worried, happy, surprised and beaten. Her beauty still remained even in that most miserable situation. She was in the dock when I entered. The two suitcases Bakari had talked about were on the prosecutor's desk. The court room was filled to capacity since

there was another case which involved two families claiming for a body which had been in a mortuary for over two months. The judgement was to be delivered on this day. Having nothing to do as the judge had temporarily adjourned Eva's case and left, the two families had, to Eva's misfortune, decided to speculate on her case; the possible offences she might have committed, why the suitcases, why the tight security inspite of her young age and the like.

I talked to the prosecutor for a second or two, saluted two uniformed police inspectors who were chatting together and in the midst of this tricky confusion got to Eva in the dock and greeted her. no one interfered with me. I knew I had confused them and they didn't know what to take me for, a lawyer, a senior officer of . . .

"Don't cry, Eva. We can't talk much now but I can assure you that when the judge comes back here, it will be to discharge you. I know what happened, everything, and by now the judge is being given the story. You understand?" She nodded. Her face now changed and it was filled with confidence. Worry and surprise left, happiness dominated and now she looked great. I left things at that stage and walked out. I knew where to meet her when she was released in case it happened

before I returned.

I flipped through the pages of the Daily Nation again, this time not leaning on a sign post, but seated comfortably behind the steering wheel of a Merc. I was looking for a house. This time not for two hundred and fifty shillings per month but for between two thousand, five hundred and three thousand shillings. My life had changed within those years. This again reminded me of the old times, my most unhappy days. From this same daily newspapers I had tried but in vain to look for a house to rent. But the type I wanted was so out of class that it wouldn't have been found here. Now I would see what I wanted. I was a new

man, a man who wouldn't have to shine other men's shoes for peanuts. Yes, the man whose first wife would never admit to having been her husband and whose son would never call him daddy now didn't have the time to worry about beautiful women as he had more than he needed.

'Bum Buru Phase II, two bedrooms, Shs 2,500, vacant, with telephone, call 3379541.' I noted that number and got out of the car. I went to 'my' office. I was in such a hurry that I didn't take time talking to the secretaries. When I was seated and had taken the phone, I realized the secretary should do that for me. I gave her the instructions and also six thousand and two hundred shillings and I left the office. I would call her later.

Back in the court, the prosecutor stood up and addressed the judge. "Your honour, we have had more developments in this case and I have been instructed by the Commissioner of Police to withdraw this case. I therefore humbly request this honourable court to discharge the accused."

"Stand up, accused." The judge now was facing Eva who stood up as instructed. "This court has discharged you under section 210 of the law of Kenya. You cannot be brought to court accused of the same offence again. I have noted with much concern the circumstances under which you were brought to court and I am sure your lawyer will advise you on

what to do next if you so wish. You are free."

We met outside the law courts. Muita, Eva and myself. Bakari was still not out. He didn't even appear in court nor did Superintendent Ochieng. We learnt from the lawyer that the three officers who were involved in Eva's arrest had been picked up that morning. Janet too would be picked and charged together with the police officers. Then the lawyer turned to me and said, "By the way, I owe you five thousand shillings. You did most of the work because all I had to do was stand."

"Mo! no, I still need your services," I interrupted. "In the meantime let me take Eva home." She thanked the lawyer and we parted.

We drove to the office. I left Eva in the car and went upstairs. Winnie had organized everything. She even had the keys to the house. She had personally gone to see the house and had it cleaned.

All that remained now was to buy the furniture which could be done without much hurry. Right now it was time to take Eva home to clean herself of prison dirt and all the other filth that prison was made of.

Eva refused to go back to our boss' house to clean herself. I was therefore forced to do plenty of shopping that day so that we could go to our new home where she would do everything freely. It took us the rest of the remaining day to get half of what we required. But we had to buy the most important things. The house would be furnished properly with time.

That night we went out for supper. Our reunion meant much to us. If there was anything to be thankful of, it was Janet's stupid and unthinkable mistake. As a result of her mistakes, we had been able to disentangle ourselves from her claws where she had us at her mercy. With the knowledge of her own mistakes, she would certainly blame no one but herself. Eva had sworn never to set her eyes on such a beastly person again. But as for me, I knew I would still get in touch with her. I was also ready to help her not to go to prison for the

offence. I was sure she would be so sorry that she wouldn't know how to explain this to me in particular.

The bed on which we now lay was new. The blanket, the bed sheets, the pillows were all new and we were under a new roof in a place of our own. Beside me was the girl I so much admired, the girl who fed me when I was so hungry, the girl who readily listened to my story which I was so eager to tell to somebody so that I would cease feeling so lonely, the girl I loved.

We hadn't talked much during the day as we had so much to do. Over supper we talked very little. Although Eva was so happy to be out of prison, she wasn't in a mood to talk. Janet's behaviour had shocked her and every second she thought about her made Eva look sick. Even now, as we lay on the bed, she was staring vacantly at the ceiling, no doubt deep in thought. All of a sudden she broke the silence. She turned to face me and put her right hand on my chest.

"Adams, I want you to tell me something. Please if you love me you'll have to tell me."

"What is it? I promise to tell you if it will make you forget everything and I'll be happy if you'll stop being thoughtful. Will you . . ."

"Yes, tell me what happened when you went to Mombasa, everything, please."

"So many things happened, Eva. So many things such that it would take us the whole night talking."

"I am ready to listen, I want to know. There must be only one reason which made that woman behave like a beast, if you had heeded my advice I wouldn't have landed in prison."

"What are you driving at, Eva? What do you mean that I was the cause of your misfortune?"

"Certainly! My love for you, I do not regret ever loving you. What's so

hurting is the thought that the beast succeeded in trapping you, something I had warned you about. Is that so? Did she succeed? Please tell me."

Now I got what she was driving at. She had suspected that I had slept with Janet, her rival, and that when I did, I probably disclosed my love for her which made Janet so mad until she decided to get rid of her. She was right, but when I thought about it, I decided that if I told her the whole truth, life between us would never be the same again. \ knew what she would feel and I saw no point of ruining our marriage by telling a simple lie. A

lie did not seem to be one if told to save a bad situation - and bring peace, I thought.

"Eva, do you mean going to bed with Mrs Wicks?*

"Yes, she trapped you and ..."

"Please don't annoy me. How would I do a thing like that knowing how you'd feel. Why do you fail to trust me, Eva? Is that the best you can do for me, after fighting such a hard battle of temptations? I feel insulted and I must say so. Eva, I did not go to bed with Janet."

"Who is Janet?"

"Janet is Mrs Wicks. She is called Janet Wanjiru. She wasn't married to Wicks. He was her father."

"I am sorry, Adams. I swear I am so happy to learn that. If you had, it would have broken my heart completely." She got hold of me and kissed me. "You are so dear to me. I was waiting for this day. It is the biggest day in my life Adams. I wish you knew how I feel seeing you beside me and knowing that you are all mine. Do you want me to tell you something funny? When the police picked me, the first thing I thought about was the ring you gave me. I knew they'd steal it. So I decided to put it in my mouth. I would have swallowed it if they had attempted to get it from me. When I was taken to remand, I knew it

was in real danger. I should have surrendered it to the prison authorities for safety keeping but I didn't. The girls I was locked up with, oh my Qod, most of them street girls and the things they were saying and doing made me feel like I would get crazy. They talked dirty things about their prostitution, what kind of men they loved, mostly old and wealthy. They talked of what they termed 'short love' which most Indians liked and paid well for. Then I saw how they smuggled illicit things into prison. You cannot imagine a woman doing that since they are given a thorough search but nothing can be found on them. They hide them deep inside their bodies, can you imagine that? My Qod! I would rather die than

go to that hell of a place again. So you see, whenever I saw the ring it reminded me of you far away from me with a beast of a woman. Those few days seemed like years to me."

"I am glad now that you are back to normal life. Eva, never suspect me again since I promised to be faithful to you and I always keep my promises/

Life started that time. I was now a married man, married to the only person I really loved. Now all my past was history. I wanted to forget everything, the bad as well as the good. That, I argued to myself was the only way in which I would be able to conquer the negative thought which lingered in man like hangovers in the morning. I had a job, a good job ahead of me, which I was sure I would tackle successfully. It wasn't an easy job but I too wasn't an easy man either. If there was a person who had really suffered, who had really tasted hell, pain and misery, it was me. I had been beaten, I mean tortured by the police time and again. I had gone for days without food, slept out in the cold with only my palm for a blanket and the worst of all I had lived a lonely life. Yes, I should also remind you that I am a good karateka, a kick boxer and quick with a gun. And to crown all this I had the most important tool in the mission ahead - a degree of ruthlessness and readiness to take out a life when necessary. Therefore, if there was anybody fit to do this job, it was me - the Son of rate.

"Thirty million shillings.' Eva, we must get it and get across the bridge

where we shall know no more bosses pulling strings for us so that we can tick."

Saturday, we woke up at 9.30 am. Eva wanted to do some shopping at Uchumi Supermarket. I drove her to town. I dropped her in a hair salon where she spent two good hours treating her hair. Later when I came for her, I parked the car outside the salon and went inside. I looked around for Eva but I couldn't see her. There was only one customer there and the three workers.

The only customer, a young beautiful girl who beat all other women I had met in my life smiled. I thought she was enjoying me for looking stupid after finding my wife gone. I felt bad, really bad but I couldn't tell her so. Before I turned to go, I had a last glance at the dress she was wearing and promised I would buy one like that for Eva. Then I realized there was a boutique in this same salon. I decided to have a look and see if I would find a similar dress. The owner of the salon was quick to notice my interest and she approached me.

"Yes sir, you are most welcome. I can see you are admiring that dress. We have others ..."

"You are right, but tell me first, I brought my wife here about two hours ago and promised to pick her around this time. In fact I am ten minutes late. Did she leave a message where I should get her?"

I saw the beautiful girl smile again, then they all burst into laughter. I turned to face the beautiful girl. Christ! I could not believe my eyes - the beautiful girl was none other than my own babe - Eva. Although words failed me, I felt very proud. I found myself hypnotized, going to her without intending to. I got hold of her and kissed.

"You are beautiful. You look so nice that I feel like you'd be good for my stomach." The ladies laughed again, amused by my admiration of my own wife.

"Pay for the dress. I wanted to surprise you and I have." I didn't argue, I got out my wallet and paid three thousand shillings which included

payment for the hair treatment. We left the salon, hand in hand.

From this point, I drove to the supermarket. For the first time in my life, I felt some deep pride inside me. Proud that I had made the best choice in my life. As we parked outside the supermarket I saw someone who made my heartbeat accelerate. It was about two and half years since I saw him last. The last time

I saw him, I was seated on a stool lower than the one on which he was sitting with his foot on the stand. I was polishing his shoes. I wouldn't have mistaken this man since I marked him well that day - the man who had remarried my wife - Joy. This was a resurrection of buried memories. Just then, I saw the son - my son get out of the supermarket carrying a small carton box. I knew who would emerge next without being told, and I was right.

"What is it, Adams? You almost hit the parking metre. Where is your mind?*

She followed my eyes. They were looking at Joy, my first wife, my son and the phoney father. We both got out of the car. As we did, I told her, "This dear, is one long story which I will once tell you and which you will find hard to believe."

I became aware that Joy was not moving. She was staring at us. I faced her and saw the surprise on her face. The son had also stopped, making the father to stop and see what was happening. They all waited for us to get to them. Joy's eyes were on me, looking at me from the shoe up to the head. She was smiling broadly as we got near them.

"Hello, Adams, it's nice to see you." She was extending her hand. I took it. My son then took my hand and shook it happily.

Mommy - isn't this the uncle who bought me a ball?" That surprised me and the mother. How could he remember a thing like that.

"Yes, tell him you bought a tennis ball and you have it up to now." She looked at me and then at Eva. I knew she wanted to be introduced.

"Meet my wife, Eva," I told her, my hand on Eva's shoulders. "Eva, this is Joy, and this young boy is called Qithure." I did not add anything more. Joy's new husband joined us.

"This is my husband. He is Alex Mwangi." We shook hands. I was sure the man couldn't remember me. He was eyeing me

then the Benz which I had stepped out of. "This is Mr and Mrs Adams," she concluded. - *

This was the woman I once loved. A woman I had stayed with as a husband and wife for over three years in which we had got the boy, Qithure. But even though I had stopped to greet her, I had not forgotten that she left me and married Alex when I was imprisoned. I also remembered vividly the day we met last, that day when she couldn't talk to me, the day she pretended she had never seen me in her life. Yes, the day she prevented my son from coming near me lest I make his clean clothes dirty. I was then polishing her husband's shoes. Now that she had seen I had advanced in life, she was ready to introduce me, even to her husband as an old good friend. I hated her, I felt she didn't deserve any respect at all. She was, like most women, an opportunist. The type that worshipped class and money. The type that should not be allowed to get near a good lady like Eva lest she spoil her.

I got hold of Eva's hand, "We are getting late, dear." To them I said. "I wish you a nice time and I hope we shall meet again." But I didn't mean it. I didn't want to ever meet her again. All my life and love belonged to Eva. We entered the supermarket hand in hand. "When we go home, remind me to tell you an interesting story."

'About that couple and their son?'

"No, about eighty five million shillings buried somewhere in Tanzania. And you know what? I am the only living person who has the right to be handed the treasure."

"You can't be serious. I think that's the joke of the year."

"I am serious - very serious. Just remind me when we get home." She looked at me and smiled. She believed me and believed whatever I told her. I got hold of her and kissed her. When I released her and opened my eyes, over forty pairs of eyes were watching us. They were all smiling.

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Son of Fate

To Son of Fate, life is a grim, long and fruitless struggle for survival after he is released from Kamiti Maximum Prison. He tries his hand at farming, tilling a small piece of land left to him by his grandmother, but rural life proves unappealing to him. Son of Fate, therefore, decides to try his luck in the city. Here he ends up sleeping on the pavements — otherwise known as 'missing line' — when money runs out. Then he starts doing odd jobs: being a watchman, shoe shining, selling fruits and second hand clothes. But everything fails and he constantly finds himself on the wrong side of the law becoming a hunted man once again. This is until the day he rescues a tycoon from the mouth of a python — then comes a glimmer of hope.

Cover artwork by George Mogeke



Spear Books